

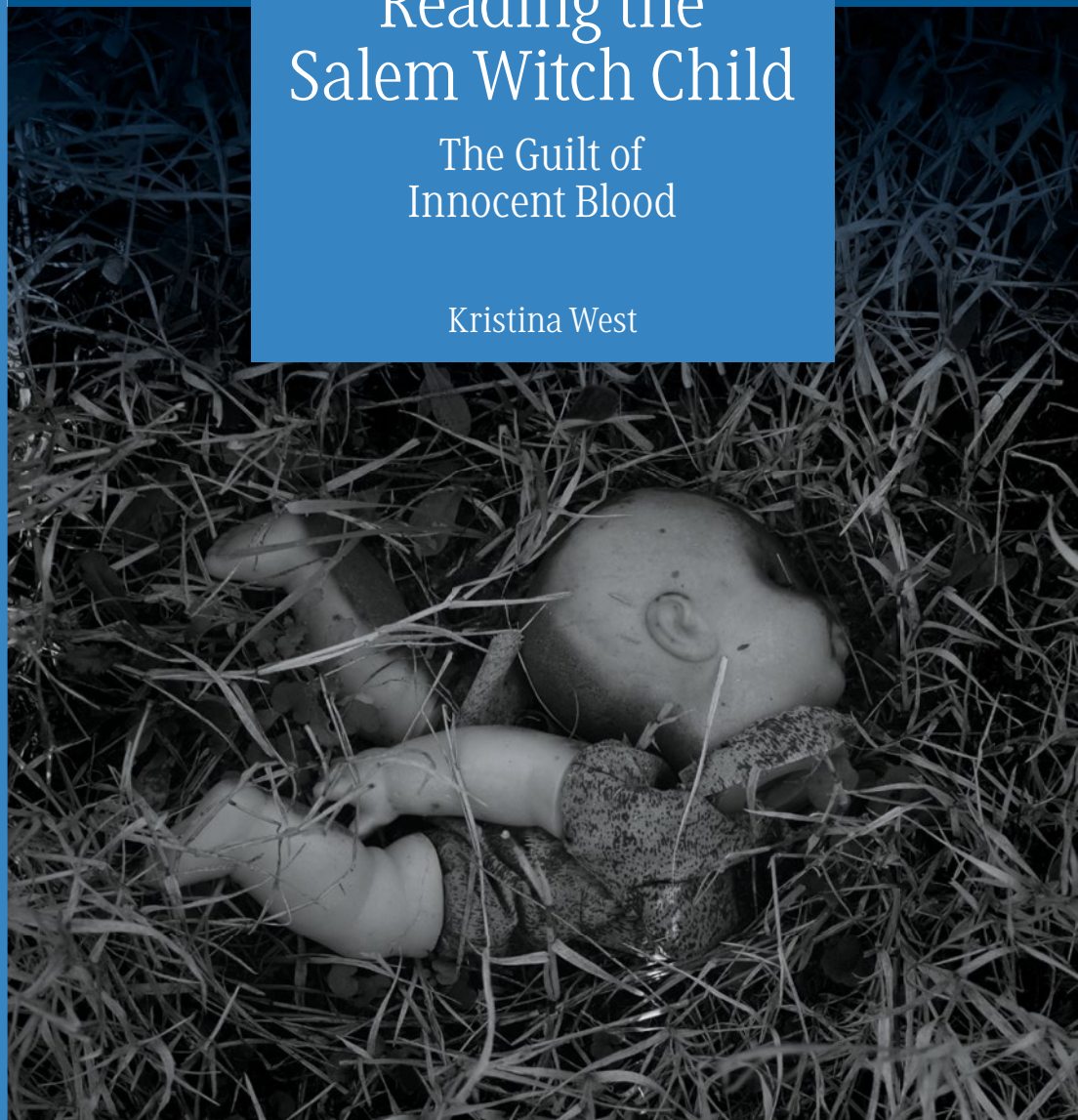


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# Reading the Salem Witch Child

The Guilt of  
Innocent Blood

Kristina West



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Kristina West  
CIRCL  
University of Reading  
Reading, UK

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*For Mike, Daniel, and Liv, with all my love*

## PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to investigate the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory roles of children in the Salem witch panic of 1692. While many may assume that child witches are a modern African phenomenon, Salem's history (and, indeed, many histories of European witch trials) shows that children as both accused witches and accusers of others date back to the early modern period and well beyond, as discussed in works such as Ronald Hutton's *The Witch*.<sup>1</sup> Scores of histories, scholarly articles, and popular investigations of America's most shocking witch trials have been written over the centuries; however, these have focused primarily on the roles of the afflicted, of the accused and executed, and of the judges in instigating and perpetuating the witchcraft trials in Salem, while largely overlooking the role of children as a distinct group. Most histories take one of two approaches to Salem's children: either they demonise the 'afflicted girls' while ignoring the accused children altogether or they dismiss Salem's children as of little importance to the progress of the trials. As such, childhood in Salem has received almost no sustained analysis, an absence that this work aims to fill.

One work that dismisses the importance of childhood in the Salem trials is Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum's influential *Salem Possessed*. It claims: '[W]e think it a mistake to treat the [afflicted] girls themselves as decisive shapers of the witchcraft outbreak as it evolved'. However, this statement leaves areas of enquiry: were the girls 'decisive shapers' at the beginning, if not 'as it evolved'; and if so, where does the decision of their status as such lie? Who were 'the girls themselves'? And why did the authors feel the need to point this out as 'a mistake' according to their

understanding? The minimal focus on children as either accusers or victims in Boyer and Nissenbaum's work supports this early authorial assertion; instead, they argue that the 'decisive shapers' of the events were, variously, social factions, religious conflict, a breakdown in Puritan values, and geographical factors.<sup>2</sup> Beneath these arguments, the accusing girls were simply pawns in games far beyond their understanding and victims of a social structure that—like Boyer and Nissenbaum—minimised their importance.

And those children accused of witchcraft in Salem garner even less attention than the accusers, rarely meriting more than a passing mention in many histories.<sup>3</sup> They were not among the 19 people hanged, and Abigail Hobbs, the only child convicted of witchcraft, was pardoned soon afterwards. And while the only child known to have died as an effect of the trials—the infant daughter of Sarah Good, who died in jail on an unrecorded date prior to July 10—merits a mention to herself on the Danvers (formerly Salem Village) witch trials memorial, she is an afterthought or an absence in most histories.

However, given that some 27 under-18s accused adults and other children of witchcraft and another 24 or more were accused of witchcraft themselves, they formed a significant group, even if such easy categorisation of what constitutes a child in Salem needs much closer analysis. My work therefore aims to fill this gap in Salem scholarship with a close analysis of childhood in and around Salem at the time of the trials, to establish who we are talking about when we talk about Salem's children; how their roles affected their own lives, the wider community, and the process and outcome of the trials; and how they have been portrayed in writing since the trials' conclusion.

In considering childhood in this work, rather than creating a new history in which children are simply placed at the forefront of the Salem story, my approach will be a close analysis of the many and varied narratives of the trials that concern Salem's children, including contemporary documents, such as court records, public letters, and accounts written by both supporters and opponents of the trials; histories written in the intervening centuries, often which aim to discover the triggers for America's most famous witch-hunt; and literature—poems, plays, fiction—that uses the events in Salem as a basis for a reworking, reimagining, or modernisation of the author's understanding of the trials, their build up, and their aftermath. The purpose and benefit of an approach that combines history and literary analysis is to aid an exploration of how childhood is created as



and through cultural memory and to consider how such constructs continue to form our understanding of both the involvement of children in historical events in Salem and of childhood in its relations to witchcraft today.

In addition to this wide selection of texts for analysis, I will also consider theoretical approaches that question what we understand a child to be and that analyse the adult investment in knowing the child that so often shapes its cultural and temporal form in order to explore further what we might mean by childhood in Salem and how we continue to reproduce and rewrite what that childhood might be. For example, Jacqueline Rose debates ‘a form of investment by the adult in the child, and [...] the demand made by the adult on the child as the effect of that investment, a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place’.<sup>4</sup> In this passage, and in her wider text on the problems with children’s literature, Rose considers the difficulty of the relationship between adult and child; the problems with any assumption that the child is known, stable, and available to be retrieved as such by the adult writer or reader; and the terminology of ‘adult’ and ‘child’, with each of these issues playing a significant role in my own analysis. Such a theoretical approach allows us to question received assumptions about childhood and to consider how Salem’s children challenge what we think we know about both early modern and modern childhood.

Both the presence and the absence of children in extant accounts, histories, and reworkings of Salem’s darkest hours warrant closer analysis than has been undertaken so far. So, too, does the narrative of guilt and innocence that, while always present in any discussion of the trials, pursues Salem’s children through these centuries of texts, sometimes favouring one group as innocent, sometimes condemning another. As such, this book will consider what is at stake in the textual portrayals of these children; question the basis on which assumptions about childhood in history are made; consider how such portrayals are frequently shaped by the need to assign guilt and therefore ‘solve’ the trials; read the child as the site of contested meaning in these narratives; and ask why an examination of the role of children in the Salem witch panic is vital both to a more comprehensive understanding of the trials and to our engagement with childhood today.

Chapter 1 will examine constructions of the child and the witch throughout history and literature, examining how the historical child is frequently positioned as innocent victim, with its harm or loss figured

primarily through any financial and emotional impact on its parents, while the literary child rather challenges the witch and takes her place, disturbing assumed boundaries between the two. It also summarises the processes of accusation and trial with which Salem's witch panic ostensibly began, but also troubles any claim to such beginnings. The chapter further establishes the theoretical approach on which this work is based, questioning how the child is constructed through narratives of the Salem trials and debating the problems with pinning it down, including the very desire to do so, although it also attempts to quantify the involvement of children (as they are positioned in various contemporary, historical, and literary texts) in the trials. Finally, I discuss how 'child' is constructed in language—here, the language of court documents, histories, and fictional writings—and consider how such constructions work to trouble any firm understanding of what a child was in Salem in 1692 and our understanding of it since.

Accusations of witchcraft against both children and adults in Salem were made primarily by those termed in courtroom documentation as 'the afflicted girls' or 'tormented children', and much of the focus on children in histories and other narratives of Salem has attempted to determine the role these children played in the instigation and severity of these trials as opposed to others in America's history of witchcraft. Such narratives ask: who were they? What role did they play? How were they perceived at the time of the trials and how might we perceive them in hindsight? And how can we understand them within a construction of what childhood is or what we expect it to be? Chapter 2 therefore aims to consider the implications of the terminology of guilt and innocence in the trials and their aftermath as they related to those termed 'the afflicted girls', noting how language constructs the guilt/innocent binary that resulted from the trials and that has shaped narratives of the panic until the present day. I also consider the language of 'performance' so often applied to the girls, one that frequently separates the assumption of innocence from that of guilt, and examine how narratives have shifted since the time of the trials. Finally, I consider how such a constant replaying of the trials—in attempting to assure who is innocent and who, therefore, guilty—is based on our need to assign children certain roles in society and how the 'afflicted girls' have come to represent both an adult idealisation of childhood and a fear that we might be wrong.

Chapter 3 focuses on Dorcas/Dorothy Good, the youngest child to be accused of witchcraft in the Salem trials. Dorcas, also called Dorothy, was between four and five years old at the time of the trials, according to the

contemporary record of Deodat Lawson. Little is known of her, either before or after the trials, and records of her involvement in the trials are scarce; yet her case has sparked much speculation in historical and critical texts. I consider why narratives of the trials have focused on Dorcas/Dorothy at the expense, perhaps, of the other accused child witches; how positionings of Dorcas/Dorothy in history and fiction trouble the guilt/innocence binary in the Salem narratives, in that she is positioned as both accuser of her own mother and accused of witchcraft herself; and how a focus on her position as guilty or innocent always depends on a simultaneous reading of her accusers and her family status. In reading constructions of Dorcas/Dorothy in criticism, historical accounts of the trials, and in fiction, this chapter explores the animalistic imagery used in respect of Salem's children; problematic representations of the child's 'voice'; and how this child 'witch' unsettles and informs accounts of the trials. Further, I discuss how she has come to symbolise all the accused children and outraged innocence itself, while still being positioned as exceptional.

In addition to Dorcas/Dorothy Good, at least 22 children under the age of 18 were accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch panic, with the only evidence offered against them from 'spectral' sources. Each of these children 'confessed', although evidence suggests that torture was used in some cases. Yet despite the undoubted horror of their stories, the names of the accused children are not among those commonly associated with the trials or the aftermath. In Chap. 4, I therefore consider readings of the accused children as marginalised in order to examine the occlusion of their stories from so many histories of the trials. However, rather than simply offering a process of retrieval in which the stories of these 'witch-children' are told more fully, I aim to consider the status of the accused children within the narratives of the trials to ask why they have received so little attention compared to the 'afflicted girls' and to consider how a reading of their omission from Salem's story has wider implications on readings of children in historical narratives. I also intend to examine the difficulty of discussing these children in isolation from accused family members to consider how their stories are so often deemed less important or significant than those of adults.

Examining the role of children in the Salem crisis is surprisingly difficult; not just because of the previously discussed difficulties with defining who or what a child was and is, but because of its position within and inextricable links to the family. Chapter 5 will expand on the exploration of the relationship between child witch and accused adult family member

in the Salem witch trials, which began with an analysis of the literature surrounding the families of Andover in Chap. 4. Beginning with an analysis of what constituted a family in late seventeenth-century Salem, I will take the premise of the 'leaky female' body proposed by theorists such as Mary Douglas and Judith Butler and expand it to discuss how children and other family members are, by definition, implicated in and part of the mother-body, and how such assumptions affected children of witch families during the trials and in later analyses, with a particular focus on the relationship between the mother, the child, and the familiar. Further, this chapter will explore how these assumptions have been brought to bear on narratives of the afflicted girls and their place within the family structure, finally considering how the family has been leveraged to underpin readings of guilt and innocence on both sides of the assumed divide between Salem's children.

Of all the children involved in the various patterns of witchcraft accusations in Essex County, Topsfield's Abigail Hobbs is perhaps most deserving of a chapter to herself in that she refuses to fit neatly into the binaries of afflicted and accused; because she was one of only six children brought to trial; and because she was the only child sentenced to death. Further, from a reading of the court records, this 14-year-old girl is one of the most controversial and interesting figures of the trials, with her testimony second only to Tituba's explosive confession in her outrageous accusations as one of the afflicted girls and in her own confessions—corroborated by friends, neighbours, and her own family—to her dealings with the devil and the murder of several unnamed children. This chapter will explore how, unlike the guilt/innocence binary that characterises representations of Dorcas/Dorothy in the histories, Abigail has been guilty in the narratives of Salem from the start.

Salem's story has been played out on screen, on stage, and in fictional retellings over the last century and beyond as interest in its history, and in the supernatural more generally, continues to grow. While I have already drawn on several such sources in the preceding chapters, Chap. 7 will consider the fictionalisation of the Salem witch trials more widely, with a particular focus on the roles assigned to children in these narratives. Salem stories primarily take two paths: those based on the historical events to some extent and those that take these events as a starting point but are based in the modern-day and/or on fictional (or fictionalised) characters. However, the common thread among most of these works is that children and adolescents are positioned as witches, although the narratives of such positioning vary widely. I will therefore consider the role of story in

constructing Salem's children and ask how these fictional narratives in which children are witches have impacted on our understanding of these historical events. I focus on four particular works—Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*; Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*; Adriana Mather's YA novel, *How to Hang a Witch*; and J. K. Rowling's movie and screenplay, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*—because each treats the events at Salem from a less direct perspective; that is, each either claims or has been claimed to be about something 'other' than Salem and its children, yet Salem's children are still important participants in each. Further, each narrative impacts on the construction of what Karen Renner terms 'evil children in the popular imagination'; that is, in how we have continued to play out the trial narrative by attributing innocence to some children and evil intent to others. I therefore want to consider how such narratives impact on popular and academic understandings of childhood in the Salem witch trials.

The concluding chapter of this work will consider how it is just as difficult to pin down the ending of the trials as it is the beginning, with each seemingly final event leading onto another; as such, I will also consider the continuing role of witchcraft and its links with childhood until the present day. This chapter will further examine the role of the archives in both answering questions and raising more, and an uncanny effect of examining the witch panic in which we, as writers and researchers, become implicated in the very structure of the trials. I will therefore conclude with an examination of what we have learned about Salem's children and consider how they remain the ghost in the house.

### A NOTE ON SPELLINGS

The spellings of names, places, and so on, are notoriously variable in records and other documents pertaining to the Salem witch trials. As such, I will use all spellings from Rosenthal et al.'s records throughout and retain spellings from direct quotations unless otherwise stated. There will also be unavoidable variations between my use of surnames and first names due to the proliferation of accused, accusers, and others with one or both names that were similar or the same: there are many Anns, Abigails, and Sarahs; likewise, many Putnams, Carriers, Mathers, and Proctors, among others. I have endeavoured for clarity in each case but apologise for any stylistic inconsistency or confusion caused.

## NOTES

1. Ronald Hutton (2017) *The Witch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
2. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (1974) *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press), p. 35n.
3. The one exception is the youngest accused witch, four-year-old Dorcas or Dorothy Good, as will be discussed in Chap. 3.
4. Jacqueline Rose (1984) *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 3–4.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# The Child and the Witch

### CHILDHOOD AND WITCHCRAFT: A BRIEF (AND LITERARY) HISTORY

In 2018, the Royal Shakespeare Company's most recent production of *Macbeth* met with harsh reviews, many of them focusing on the decision to cast children as the three witches. '[I]t sounds as though they have no idea what the words mean and are just up beyond their bedtime', said *The Guardian*.<sup>1</sup> '[T]hey're quite sugar and spice and all things nice, and something unkind in me whispers that they rather look as if they've wandered in from a *Matilda* audition', commented *What's On Stage*.<sup>2</sup> *The Independent* added: 'They dart about in hooded crimson onesies, each cradling a doll, their prognostications sounding an eerie sing-song note of innocence knocked, snaggingly, out of kilter.'<sup>3</sup> Despite their varying points of focus, each review that comments on the children has focused on their status as anomalous, out-of-place, wrong. The problem, therefore, appears to be an assumed disconnect between children and witchcraft; specifically in the assumption that children should not—cannot—be witches, with their casting as such raising issues of compromised innocence and sweetness that the reviewers have themselves constructed as their ideas (and ideals) of what childhood both is and should be. There is also a sense that the children's *performance* as witches was somehow lacking; that they were not sufficiently convincing; that the audience—or, at least, the reviewer—just did not buy it. As such, the idea of what a witch should be pre-exists and influences any attempt at criticism.

However, while Shakespeare may not have written his witches specifically as children ('You should be women / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so', comments Banquo), there is a correlation between childhood and witchcraft across literature from fairy tales to twenty-first-century young adult (YA) literature.<sup>4</sup> As Lyndal Roper comments:

The stories about witches, wands, mice, and demons [testified to be children in European witch trials], which people were starting to purchase for pleasure in the late seventeenth century, would in the end become part of a nineteenth-century canon of folklore and fairy tale to be purveyed to children, and they still hold their place in children's fiction today.<sup>5</sup>

As such, what Roper reads as the imagination of children that populated their real-life accusations of witchcraft with familiars and witches has informed much later fiction and formed a new correlation between witchcraft and childhood in fiction. In fairy tales, the child is often constructed as the innocent victim of the elderly, crone-like, evil witch: think *Snow White*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and more recently *The Wizard of Oz*. Yet even in modern, Disney-led retellings of tales rooted in a much grimmer tradition, in which the unassailable innocence of the child lends itself more to post-Romantic than early modern literary constructions of childhood (although I will trouble such categories throughout this work), these stories tell us that the children can, and do, win. Dorothy drops a house on one witch and melts another, even as the constructions of witches as evil are troubled by the presence of a helpful 'good witch' and Dorothy's identification by Marion Gibson as a 'witch-like heroine'.<sup>6</sup> After being tempted in by their greed for candy and cake, Hansel and Gretel manage to bundle their witch into her own oven.<sup>7</sup> And Disney's *Snow White* witch-queen dies through her own misdeeds, a victim of her evil against the snow-white innocence of the child (despite that child's subsequent move into an ostensibly adult sexuality through an unsought kiss while unconscious from a man in a position of power, one that would never pass muster in the days of #MeToo). Storybook children triumph over their witches, denounce them, and frequently kill them; but here, the seemingly unassailable line between the guilt of the malefactor-witch and the innocence of the child victim becomes somewhat hazy. Is this the triumph of good over evil or, in frequently becoming the killer, is the child morphing into the witch in its turn, moving out of its socially approved hierarchical

place (as the frequently female literary witch so often does too) to achieve its own ends and exert its own power, while the witch takes the child's place as victim?

In literature aimed at older children from the twentieth- and twenty-first-century YA market, the correlation of childhood and witchcraft troubles the binary of evil witch and innocent child victim with even more conviction. In novels such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Adriana Mather's *How to Hang a Witch*, the children—particularly the teenage girls who are also assumed to encompass the books' primary readership—are witches, if not witches in the stereotypical evil old crone type. Rowling's Hermione Granger may not be the central character in the series, but she is the cleverest witch in the school.<sup>8</sup> And in Adriana Mather's modern-day reimagining of the events in Salem, the 'Descendants'—of both accused and accusers—exhibit magical powers, each of them questioning and playing with the binary of good versus evil that we have come to expect.<sup>9</sup> While the malevolence of the fairy tale crone-witch is frequently absent from these child witch characterisations, the assumption of a child's right to supernatural power is unquestioned in these texts, in contrast to those reviewers of *Macbeth* who were unable (and unwilling) to reconcile the two.

The relationship of childhood and witchcraft across history is no less complex than that of literature. Children are most frequently positioned as passive victims of witchcraft in historical accounts, targeted in their cots or even before birth either to avenge some alleged or imagined slight from mother to witch or to gain power over the new mother, with the child's loss to its family figured as both emotional and economic. The infamous 1487 witch-hunting treatise, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*), gave examples, claiming that one midwife 'confessed she had killed babies without number' and positing that even when midwives 'do not kill babies, they offer them to the demons by devoting them with a curse'.<sup>10</sup> Further, according to Brian P. Levack, the witches' sabbath contained

activities that reversed all the moral norms of society. Chief among these was the sacrifice of unbaptized infants to the Devil, followed by their dismemberment and consumption. In 1609 witches in the Basque region of northern Spain confessed to "killing children and exhuming and devouring the corpses of witches and unbaptized children" (Henningsen 1980, 107). [...] The charges against a German midwife in 1587 included not only killing

countless infants as she delivered them but also exhuming one or two corpses of innocent children every year, eating them, and using their hair and bones for witchcraft. (Monter 1969, 75–81)<sup>11</sup>

These two examples position babies in terms of an original innocence more commonly associated with Romantic than early modern constructions of children, with their status as unbaptised—and therefore their inability to enter Heaven—adding to the horror of their destruction and consumption, in an inversion of motherhood in which the babies feed the witch mother-substitute rather than the biological mother feeding the baby. Yet, in another sense, these children are positioned as unimportant, at least to the witch and to these narratives: the *Malleus* references ‘babies without number’ and Levack notes ‘countless infants’. Babies are only important in terms of the symbolic loss of innocence: their identities are either lost, not important enough to record, or irrelevant; as such, they are positioned as negatives and as loss itself.

However, historical children were more than voiceless and nameless victims to signify a material and emotional loss to their parents or to demonstrate the effects of *maleficium*: children were also accusers, sending witches to their deaths in the manner of their later fictional counterpart, Dorothy. In 1612, for example, 20 people were tried for witchcraft in the Northern English village of Pendle, Lancashire, as nine-year-old Jennet Device accused a number of ‘witches’, including her mother, sister, and brother; 10 people were executed on her evidence.<sup>12</sup> The decision to allow Jennet to give evidence in court, reputedly based on James I’s declaration in his *Daemonologie* that ‘[c]hildren, women and liars can be witnesses over high treason against God’, was included in Michael Dalton’s 1618 reference book for magistrates, *The Countrey Justice*, a text that was influential in allowing the testimony of children during North American witch trials.<sup>13</sup> Further, in Boston, shortly before the Salem accusations began, Cotton Mather narrated the case of the four Goodwin children, who accused their washerwoman, Irish immigrant Goody Ann Glover, of witchcraft. She was hanged on their evidence in 1688, the last witch to be executed in Boston; as in nearby Salem four years later, spectral evidence—in which the shape, or spectre, of the witch attacked the children and evidence of such was admissible in court—played a significant role in her conviction.<sup>14</sup>

And, despite the frequently claimed innate innocence of infants, older early modern children were also believed to be witches. Examples abound,

especially in accounts of European witchcraft. The best known may be the Mora witch trials in Sweden, in 1669, in which around 300 children were accused of attending the witch feasts; a few against their will, but most were said to have attended willingly.<sup>15</sup> Overall, 85 people were executed, including 15 children who were burned to death as witches; 36 children between 9 and 15 years of age were punished by having to ‘run the gauntlet’ and having their hands lashed every Sunday for a year; and 20 undernines were ‘lashed with rods upon their hands’ at the church door on three consecutive Sundays.<sup>16</sup> As late as 1723, in Augsburg, Germany, around 20 children aged between 6 and 16 years were taken into custody, accused—mostly by their parents, in a reversal of many witch trials in which parents were accused by children—of *maleficium*.<sup>17</sup>

Across history and literature, therefore, children have been positioned in relation to witchcraft: as innocent victims, as accusers, as witches, and frequently in the liminal ground between these seemingly opposing statuses. But how is such a reading of childhood relevant to the Salem trials? Before we explore the role of children in Salem, let us remind ourselves of what we know—or think we know—about the trials so far.

### THE SALEM WITCH PANIC: TROUBLING BEGINNINGS

The ostensible beginning of Salem’s witch hunt has been dated to January 1692, when the daughter and niece of contentious Salem Village minister, Samuel Parris, began to act strangely. Elizabeth ‘Betty’ Parris was nine years old and her cousin, Abigail Williams, was 11 or 12 and living with the Parris family when the girls began to complain of sharp pains like pinches, a sensation that soon progressed to their speaking gibberish and making strange gestures, and their bodies twisting into uncomfortable positions. A previous minister of Salem Village, Deodat Lawson, claimed that Abigail Williams ‘was at first hurried with Violence to and fro in the room [...] sometimes making as if she would fly’, while John Hale, Puritan minister of Beverly, Massachusetts, reported: ‘These Children were bitten and pinched by invisible agents; their arms, necks, and backs turned this way and that way, and returned back again, so as it was impossible for them to do of themselves, and beyond the power of any Epileptick Fits, or natural Disease to effect.’<sup>18</sup> Each of these reports claims an agency beyond the child: Williams ‘was [...] hurried’, and the children were attacked ‘by invisible agents’. When prayer failed to effect any positive change, local physicians were called in, resulting in the diagnosis that the girls may be

‘under an evil hand’.<sup>19</sup> By late February, other Salem Village girls, including 12-year-old Ann Putnam Jr. and 17-year-old Elizabeth Hubbard, were also complaining of affliction, specifically by witchcraft. Under pressure from questioning adults to tell who afflicted them, the girls finally named their tormentors: Tituba, a slave in the Parris household; itinerant beggar, Sarah Good; and Sarah Osborn, a social misfit due to her non-attendance at church, her improper marriage to ex-bondsman, Alexander Osborn, and property disputes involving the powerful Putnam family.

Good was the first to be brought to trial, on March 25, 1692, but hundreds of accusations were to follow, from the usual suspects first arrested—older women and those who, for various reasons, lived on the edge of society—to respected former ministers, young children, and self-confessed witches. When the trials finally ended in 1693, 19 accused witches had been hanged for their crimes, all of whom claimed their innocence until the end; one man, Giles Corey, had been pressed to death with stones for refusing to submit to the judgement of the court; and several people (including Osborn and Good’s unnamed baby daughter) had died in jail. The final number of accused witches associated with the Salem panic may never be known, but stands at somewhere around 200 and, despite its enduring name as the Salem witch trials, its victims derived from across Essex County, including Salem Village, Salem Town, Topsfield, Billerica, and especially Andover, which accounted for the largest number of both accused and confessing witches and for the majority of the accused children. After increasingly vociferous questioning about the legal, religious, and moral basis of the trials from local townspeople and influential Boston residents, the force of the panic began to abate. The final hangings, of seven women and one man, took place on September 22, 1692; the Court of Oyer and Terminer was dismissed by the end of October; and suspects began to be released on bail as early as October, with the last of the accused pardoned by Governor Phips in May 1693. While the trials resumed in early January, no further witches were executed.

Yet the beginning of the affair was more fluid than might at first appear and, as such, its origin with the afflicted children is troubled. After all, the Salem trials were anomalous in US history in more ways than the comparatively large toll of hanged and accused in such a contracted time period and the concentrated geographical area of the accusations. The events in Salem have been described by historian Emerson Baker as the ‘perfect storm’; under such a claim, a pre-existing set of conditions had to be in place for the events to unfold in the way that they did and reach the numerical and geographical magnitude that provide at least two of the many reasons why the



name of Salem has become synonymous with witches in American history and popular culture.<sup>20</sup> Detailed explanations of such conditions may be found across histories of the trials and of seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Boyer and Nissenbaum discuss the social and geographical structure of Salem and other affected towns and villages, and how this impacted on the development of the accusations and trials. Mary Beth Norton explores the impact of wars with the Indians and the French, charting the fear and instability of a life under which the threat of witchcraft could appear very real and present.<sup>21</sup> Other historians discuss the precedents of witch trials—especially those involving children as victim-accusers—in Massachusetts in the years preceding 1692; the factionalism that resulted in Salem Village appointing four ministers in less than 20 years, and the problems that beset Samuel Parris from the very outset of his discussions about taking on such an unpopular post; the contentious desire for the separation of Salem Village from Salem Town; the legal issues faced by courts resulting from the withdrawal of Massachusetts' royal charter; and many other factors under which the witch trials may have thrived. As such, dating the beginning of the witch panic from January 1692 and with the first afflicted girls is disingenuous at best; as I will discuss in Chap. 8, dating the ending of the trials will be no less problematic.

### WHAT IS A CHILD?

In considering the history of children's relationship with witchcraft in this work, in particular through the narratives of Salem, I intend to analyse the investment through which the term 'child' is used, thereby establishing a theoretical basis within discourses of childhood by which this term can be unsettled; for example, in assumptions of innocence or its lack as constructions of childhood shift across the centuries and between texts. Further, this work will consider what Karín Lesnik-Oberstein terms 'the idea that childhood [...] is a historically and culturally contingent construction, not an essential, transhistorical or transcultural continuity, predetermined by inherent biological or physiological factors'.<sup>22</sup> After all, when we talk about the involvement of 'children' in the Salem witch trials, our first task must be to consider who, or what, we are talking about.

On beginning this research, I wanted to discover how many children were actively involved in the Salem witch trials: how many were accusers, how many were accused of witchcraft, and who they were. But both the surviving documentation and later historical analysis have proven surprisingly resistant to such an attempt. The question that therefore recurs

throughout my research is one that Ralph Waldo Emerson asked his New England readers 144 years later: ‘what is a child?’<sup>23</sup> Because a stable definition of who was—or was not—a child in Salem in 1692 appears impossible. The document that Erica Burman claims ‘most accounts take’ as the first child study, Charles Darwin’s ‘Biographical Sketch of an Infant’, was based on notes made in 1840 and not published until 1877.<sup>24</sup> Yet an investment in childhood *as* childhood began some 200 years earlier, at least, as Adam Phillips comments in his Introduction to the 1996 reissue of Philippe Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood*: ‘Before the seventeenth century people had been children; but before the seventeenth century there was no such thing as childhood [...] [B]efore the seventeenth century childhood experience was not deemed worthy of representation.’ He adds: ‘At a certain point in history [...] children became visible.’<sup>25</sup> In these claims, Phillips destabilises ideas of childhood as that which can ever be situated as itself: there were children, but there was no childhood; there was ‘childhood experience’ but it did not matter; and ‘childhood became visible’, suggesting that it can be invisible and unimportant but still exist, no matter his claim to ‘no [...] childhood’. The only constant in Phillips’ construction of childhood is therefore a temporal one: in his repetition of ‘before the seventeenth century’, we might read an assumption that, after this point, childhood became stable, known, and crucially *seen*, and therefore positioned as knowable from a perspective that must always sit outside of itself. While neither Phillips nor Ariès in the text to which this is a modern introduction is actually claiming quite such an extreme shift at a very particular point in history, this dividing marker introduces some interesting questions in relation to childhood in Salem. Was there a ‘childhood’ in Salem, or just ‘children’? Had this development of seventeenth-century Europe reached the frigid shores of the New World by 1692? Or was this actually part of what happened in Salem: that the children were becoming visible and their ‘experience worthy of representation’, but with undreamed of consequences?

Much historical research into early modern childhood followed in Ariès’ wake and, as did he, focused primarily on childhood in Europe. However, this does not mean that childhood has been fixed to Ariès’ definitions. As Joanne M. Ferraro comments: ‘It became apparent at the outset that there was more than one model of childhood’ and that such ‘models’ were subject to ‘broader economic and demographic cycles’. As Ferraro points out further, trends in the examination of childhood have changed to include a wider range of social classes and experiences of childhood, with the analysis of a much wider range of related documents including ‘the annals of war

and treaties' to 'records of birth, baptism, marriage, and death as well as tax data and notarial documents'. Ferraro adds: 'Further, the burgeoning field of cultural studies and art history made literary texts, diaries, poetry, ages-of-man literature [...], advice books, family letters, humanist writings, catechisms, hagiography, and iconography popular sources for the exploration of social life.'<sup>26</sup> In other words, what childhood *was* in early modern times was, and is, as varied as the sources that produce it, even if what the majority of these sources have in common is that they were written by adults; as such, one might argue that childhood both within and outside of texts is similarly an adult production.

A further study focusing on defining early American childhood is Sanford Fleming's *Children and Puritanism*, although Fleming confines his research to the relationship between childhood and the New England Puritan Church. Even within this relatively narrow field, however, Fleming struggles to define what a child was in seventeenth-century (and beyond) Puritan experience and theology. He claims: 'One thing that has stood out [...] is the relative constancy of the general and doctrinal characteristics [of childhood] for more than two centuries.'<sup>27</sup> Yet these characteristics appear to be centred around an absence as Fleming, like Phillips, notes: '[I]n reality the child as a child had no recognition. There was an utter failure to appreciate the distinction between the child and the adult.'<sup>28</sup> He adds: 'As yet the child had not been discovered, and there was no understanding of his real nature and needs.'<sup>29</sup> In Fleming's language of 'no recognition [...] utter failure [...] not been discovered [and] no understanding', the Puritan New England child is both present and absent: unseen in 'his' (as gendered by Fleming) own time but real, fixed, and available to be retrieved as such in order to be positioned as a prior absence in Fleming's own and beyond.

Despite such claims to an absence of understanding of childhood, however, Thomas Brattle's public 'letter' of October 1692 (ostensibly addressed to an English clergyman) criticising the Salem witch trials appears to working out some of these issues around who or what a child might be. He speaks frequently of 'the possessed girls' and 'these afflicted children'; yet, he adds:

That when I call these afflicted "the afflicted children," I would not be understood as though I meant, that all that are afflicted are *children*: there are several young men and women that are afflicted, as well as children: but this term has most prevailed among us, because of the younger sort that were first afflicted, and therefore I make use of it.<sup>30</sup>

According to Brattle, then, there was a definite and knowable divide between the ungendered ‘children’ and ‘young men and women’, even if he does not state the basis for his conclusions; yet this is destabilised in and by linguistic terminology, by ‘call’ and ‘term’, both of which unsettle the stated certainty, subject as they are to naming and to intent. There is also a difference between “‘children’”, *‘children’*, and ‘the younger sort’ in this narrative. From Brattle’s statement, we might infer that his understanding of childhood is always relative to that which supersedes it—here, a gendered though still ‘young’ adulthood—but that the language of ‘children’ is less sure; it can do duty for more than it is intended to encompass.

Further, in one of the few—if brief—analyses focusing solely on Salem’s children, Darya Mattes’ paper, ‘Accused children in the Salem witchcraft crisis’, claims that

it is important to note that it is difficult to define a discrete category of ‘children’ within the crisis. Whereas a study of men as witches is obviously quite clear-cut, it is less easy to say who was a child in the crisis of 1692, both for reasons of documentation and because contemporary notions of who was a ‘child’ may have differed from modern ones.<sup>31</sup>

Mattes recognises some of the difficulties experienced by Brattle yet there is still an assumption of a real and knowable child that is available to be discovered, even if we are not able to do so from our vantage point of the ‘modern’: in assuming a difference in ‘notions’ of the child between ‘contemporary’ and ‘modern’, Mattes is claiming an agreement within time periods of what a child is, one that is difficult to sustain. We also again run into difficulties constructed primarily through and in language: children are subject to categorisation, to saying, and to ‘notions’, and to the conditionals of ‘quite’ and ‘may’, despite the claim that such definitions of childhood may have settled in ‘modern’ times. Further, although for the purposes of her paper Mattes categorises children as ‘someone under twelve’, even she admits that this is ‘entirely artificial’.

A recourse to legal definitions of childhood provides little more in the way of clarification. In her work on the legal status of children in early modern England and America, Holly Brewer begins:

In sixteenth-century England, children over age seven were of ‘ripe age’ to marry (under seven they could contract only ‘espousals’, or betrothals). Four-year-olds could make wills to give away their goods and chattels.

Children of any age could bind themselves into apprenticeships. Eight-year-olds could be hanged for arson or any other felony. Teenagers were routinely elected to Parliament. Children who owned sufficient property could vote. And custody as we know it did not exist. These norms applied not only in England but in Virginia as it was founded during the seventeenth century. Although modified by Massachusetts and Pennsylvania at their founding, these norms changed even more in England over the next two centuries, a change accelerated in America by the Revolution.<sup>32</sup>

As such, and in line with Mattes' argument, childhood appears impossible to fix in language, varying between 'children over age seven', '[c]hildren of any age', '[c]hild-year-olds', and 'teenagers', all of whom are subject to Brewer's titular claim to 'children'; and this fluidity can be applied to seventeenth-century New England just as much as to sixteenth-century England. There is also an assumption of difference between the early modern period and our own, although the legal differences are easier to trace. Yet, as we can see from the Jennet Device case in England, even the legal status of children during this period was not fixed and precedent often opened the way for changes that unsettled the status of child still further. As Brewer states here, 'these norms changed', both in their transfer from the old to the new world, and as these respective territories developed their own legal systems over time. Even now, in the US, childhood is not as settled as we might assume. For example, the legal age of marriage fluctuates between states: according to a 2017 report from the *Washington Post*, while most states set 18 as the minimum age for marriage, there are exceptions in every state, typically with parental or judicial consent. In the period 2000–2010, in 38 states, more than 167,000 children—almost all of them girls, some as young as 12—were married, mostly to men 18 or older.<sup>33</sup> Such fluctuations in the legal system serve to destabilise definitions of childhood—and even of Americanism as an overarching concept—still further.

### READING THE PURITAN CHILD

In seeking to understand what childhood is or might be in the Salem witch trials and their narratives, we must also consider extant readings of a Puritan childhood on which many historical theses are based: after all, most analysis of Salem's children focuses on the 'afflicted girls' and their assumed deviance from the model of a proper Puritan childhood, as well as from what we might expect children to be as constructed through a

modern, western perspective. One of the aims of this work will be to trouble what Puritan childhood might have been through an exploration of narratives concerning Salem's children.

One key source in which the New England Puritan child is both present and absent is in the *New England Primer*. Originally published in 1688 by Benjamin Harris in Boston, with further editions added throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, both the content of the *Primer* and its very existence construct a view on childhood that is contemporaneous with the Salem witch trials.<sup>34</sup> According to Samuel J. Smith, 'estimates of copies sold [in New England but also throughout colonial America and parts of England range from] six to eight million by 1830'.<sup>35</sup> The presence and popularity of such a textbook speaks perhaps more to the laws of supply and demand than to a particular production or reproduction of Puritan childhood; likewise, as is the case with the majority of contemporary and modern sources, this text was necessarily an adult production rather than that of a child. Nevertheless, the presence and popularity of the text both speak to a shift in New England Puritan views of childhood in the desirability of their education and its formalisation within the bounds of a widely available guide, particular given that the Massachusetts law that 'required literacy instruction to all children, servants, and apprentices' was introduced back in 1642, although we must also take into account the relatively new availability of the printing press and the necessary cost of such a book that would exclude the lower classes.<sup>36</sup>

A key contemporary document that discusses the role of the child in Puritan society is Cotton Mather's *A Family Well-Ordered*, published after the trials in 1699.<sup>37</sup> The subtitle alone gives a fair indication of its contents: 'An essay to render parents and children happy in one another. Handling two very important cases. I. What are the duties to be done by pious parents, for the promoting of piety in their children. II. What are the duties that must be paid by children to their parents, that they may obtain the blessings of the dutiful.' Mather is both constructing the ideal Puritan family in terms of relations between parent and child, and alerting the reader to the fact that this relation may not come naturally and, as such, be in need of help from a treatise such as this and from Mather himself. In considering the role of the children in this ideal state, Mather shows that the behaviour he recommends must be taught but that it cannot be taken for granted even then. He writes: 'Undutiful Children soon become horrid Creatures, for Unchastity, for Dishonesty, for Lying, and all manner of Abominations: And the Contempt which they cast upon the

Advice of their Parents, is one thing that pulls down the Curse of God upon them.’<sup>38</sup> While he has previously set out the duties of parents in assuring that their families are ‘well-ordered’, both for their own benefit on earth and in the afterlife and for wider society, here he establishes the role of the children, much of which is to be dutiful and loving to their parents. While this establishes the patriarchal model of a Puritan family much as might be expected (particularly in Mather’s further admonishments on the weaknesses of mothers), it is also interesting in that it appears to position the Puritan child within a preconceived model—as dutiful and pliant—but in fact does the opposite: in Mather’s fire-and-brimstone threats can be read the probability that the Puritan child frequently fails to meet this ideal; otherwise, why would such threats be deemed necessary? These claims also show that parental influence alone is inadequate to control such children. It might be assumed that this feeds the pre-Romantic assumption that children are born into wickedness and, like the rest of Puritan society, must be saved by the grace of God, with that grace evidenced by their own dutiful behaviour; yet Mather also espouses the later Romantic assumption that, as Wordsworth claims, ‘the child is father to the man’ in his claim that childhood misdemeanours will be carried into adulthood and magnified accordingly.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as I will continue to discuss, what is most frequently positioned as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic model of childhood innocence is in evidence at points throughout the trials.

While it is, of course, difficult to ascertain whether Mather’s treatise was influenced by the Salem trials just seven years earlier, he admonishes children further: ‘I tell you, oh undutiful children; there is danger, lest you be so cursed of God, as to be hanged on a tree at the last.’<sup>40</sup> While no children were hanged during the trials, Mather and his readers would have been aware of the numbers of accused and confessing children, and the later vilification of the afflicted girls too; as such, this threat may have carried some weight in Mather’s attempts to bring the unruly Puritan children into line with his expectations. In reading childhood in Salem, I will consider this split in the construction of a Puritan childhood further to consider if and how Salem’s children—and the link between childhood and witchcraft in Massachusetts that preceded Salem through the Goodwin children and other cases—were the catalyst for such a change or simply part of a wider understanding of the Puritan childhood that is often espoused. Further, I will consider the role played by understandings of the family in this consideration of children as accused witches.

## SALEM'S CHILDREN

Given the difficulties encountered so far in deciding who or what a child might be, how can we discuss childhood in Salem at all, and on what basis might I claim that an understanding of the role of children in the Salem witch trials is fundamental to an understanding of the trials themselves? Firstly, it seems important to quantify the involvement of children in the trials, as far as we are able with the restrictions already discussed in place. The following tables may aid an understanding of the scale of children's involvement, no matter where we draw the age line that separates adulthood from childhood. Table 1.1 includes both accused and accusers under the age of 12, arranged alphabetically; Table 1.2 covers children aged 13–15; Table 1.3 ages 16–17; and Table 1.4 those aged 18 or over who, for one reason or another, have been included by historians or commentators on the trials in the list of 'children'. Tables 1.5 and 1.6 separate the numbers of afflicted/accusers and accused. The reason for this approach, one in which both accusers and accused appear mostly in the same tables, is that those children accused frequently went on to accuse others, often a family member, either of *maleficium* or of 'making' them into witches. For example, and as will be discussed in Chap. 4, four of the Carrier children accused their mother Martha among others; Martha was subsequently executed, although not on her children's evidence alone. Based on this understanding—that accused children were often accusers in their turn—I have also made a distinction between those who were accusers and those who were both accusing and afflicted; that is, those who publicly and repeatedly evidenced symptoms that were consistent with the effects of *maleficium*. The children that fall under this category were rarely (with exceptions) also accused of witchcraft.

There are, however, other groups of children who have resisted such quantifying and therefore are not included in the following statistics, although they will be discussed at other points in this text. One such group is those children claimed as victims of witchcraft by others but about whom we know very little. As the trials progressed, the afflicted infrequently claimed visitations by spirits claiming their murder at the hands of one of the accused and telling of the murders of children. Susannah Sheldon, for example, claimed that George Burroughs' spirit confessed to her that he had killed three children in Maine, two of his wives, and also two of his own children.<sup>41</sup> Ann Putnam Jr. added her testimony that the spirits of Deodat Lawson's wife and her child came to her and said Burroughs had murdered them.<sup>42</sup> And Abigail Hobbs confessed to killing



‘both Boys and Girls’ at Burroughs’ behest.<sup>43</sup> While we can verify that the deaths of named children took place, we cannot in any way assume truth in the links made by the accusers or verify the accused’s involvement in any child deaths, named or unnamed; that Abigail was not indicted for her claimed murders suggest that she, at least, was not believed.<sup>44</sup>

These tables also do not include figures for another group of children. Towards the end of the trials, requests for financial aid and restitution of property were made to the courts on behalf of children whose parents had been imprisoned and/or executed during the trials and who were therefore left destitute. Richard Hite tells of the children of Samuel and Sarah Wardwell, for example: ‘The jailing of the Wardwells, and subsequent execution of Samuel had left four children, ranging in age from fifteen-year-old Samuel, Jr. to five-year-old Eliakim, uncared for (the infant Rebecca remained in jail with her mother)’.<sup>45</sup> In late September, the children were placed into other homes as ‘a show of charity’, Hite claims. Yet other children were not so fortunate: the Proctor children, for example, were left with no means of support when their father was hanged, their pregnant mother imprisoned, their servant—afflicted girl Mary Warren—jailed for turning against her friends, and their estate illegally seized: Elizabeth Proctor petitioned for its return in May 1696 as will be discussed further in Chap. 5.<sup>46</sup>

The final group of children who are unaccounted for but that need to be considered within the context of the trials are the babies, both those born in prison during the trials and those whose conception kept their mothers from the gallows: Elizabeth Proctor was reprieved for this reason. The only two children known to have died in prison are Sarah Good’s baby, possibly named Mercy, and the newborn child of Elizabeth Scargen, both of whom lived most of their short lives within prison walls.

Although these tables are accurate to the best of my knowledge there are, of course, some issues. Ages were not always recorded, and even when they were, errors and guesses often formed part of the calculations; as such, not all the sources agree. It is also the case that—naturally—the children had birthdays, so may have straddled more than one age boundary during the course of the trials: Richard Carrier is one example, as he turned 18 shortly before his trial. Finally, the age boundaries I have selected are, by definition, artificial: they are not intended to represent distinct and agreed phases of childhood, but rather varying ages of legal and criminal responsibility that may define one from another. As such, these tables are intended as a guide to the involvement of children in the Salem witch trials but do not, in any way, intend to secure a resolution, either of what a child is or as a final tally of children’s involvement in the trials.

**Table 1.1** Accused, accusing, and afflicted children (age 0–12)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
Sarah Carrier	8	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned; case dismissed	Died 1772
Thomas Carrier Jr.	10	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned; case dismissed	Died 1740
Phoebe Chandler	12	Andover	Afflicted/ accuser	Testified against Martha Carrier	Married 1708; fate unknown
Abigail Faulkner Jr.	9	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned 1 month; cleared May 1693	Fate unknown
Dorothy Faulkner	12	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned 1 month; cleared May 1693	Fate unknown
Dorcas/ Dorothy Good	4/5	Salem Village	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned 7 months; case dismissed	The youngest accused and accuser, she was mentally ill by the time of her release; fate unknown
Abigail Johnson	11	Andover	Accused	Imprisoned 5 weeks; part of October 6 recognisance for release of three children	No examination survives; accused by mother, Elizabeth Johnson; married before 1717; fate unknown
Elizabeth Nichols	12		Accuser	Accused Abigail Hobbs	Fate unknown
Elizabeth (Betty) Parris	9	Salem Village	Afflicted/ accuser	The first afflicted girl	Married 1710; died 1760 in Concord, Massachusetts
Sarah Phelps	10	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ afflicted/ accuser	Accused many	Fate unknown
Ann Putnam Jr.	12	Salem Village	Afflicted/ accuser	One of the most prolific accusers	The only afflicted girl known to publicly repent her role; died 1715

*(continued)*

**Table 1.1** (continued)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
Jemima Rea	12	Salem Village	Afflicted/accuser	Accused Goody Nurse, Cloyce, and Black	Fate unknown
Johanna Tyler	12	Andover	Accused	Arrested; tried; not guilty	Cleared May 10, 1693; died before 1728
Margaret Toothaker	9	Billerica	Accused	Arrested and imprisoned	Taken in an Indian raid soon after her release; fate unknown
Abigail Williams	12	Salem Village	Afflicted/accuser	Accused many	Fate unknown

Table 1.1 covers the accused, accusing, and afflicted children up to the age of 12. As it shows, four of the afflicted children were aged 12 or under, including Elizabeth ‘Betty’ Parris, daughter of Salem Village’s minister, whose affliction—and the reactions of the adults and children around her—kickstarted the panic. Ann Putnam Jr., one of the most active accusers, also falls within this age group, although she may have turned 13 at some point during the proceedings. The youngest accuser was Salem Village’s Dorcas/Dorothy Good, aged four or five, who implicated her mother for giving her a familiar. The afflicted in this age group came from both Salem Village and Andover, while the non-afflicted accusers—those also accused—predominantly came from Andover. Dorcas/Dorothy was the youngest accused ‘witch’. Nine children in total aged 12 or under were accused, most of them from Andover. The only seeming geographical anomaly in the list—Margaret Toothaker from Billerica—was a cousin of the Carrier children; many of Martha Carrier’s extended family found themselves similarly accused, although Margaret was unusual in that she was accused by her own father, Roger Toothaker, a self-claimed cunning-man and witch-finder, who died in prison. Johanna Tyler was one of only six children known to have been tried for witchcraft; she and her sister, Hannah, were found not guilty. All the accused and arrested children are known to have survived prison.

Table 1.2 Accused, accusing, and afflicted children (age 13–15)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
Mary Barker	13	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned 6 weeks; tried, found not guilty	Died 1752
William Barker Jr.	14	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned 6 weeks; tried, found not guilty	Died 1745
Alice Booth	14	Salem	Afflicted/ accuser	Accused several	Married 1700; fate unknown
Mary Bridges Jr.	13	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned; acquitted May 1693	Fate unknown
Andrew Carrier	15	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned; released on bail	Tortured to confess; died 1749
Elizabeth Colson	15; 16 when arrested	Reading	Accused	Escaped after indictment May 14 but found and sent to jail; released	In prison September 14, 1692–March 2, 1693; died c. 1725
Rose Foster	13	Andover	Afflicted/ accuser	Accused many	Died in Andover February 1693
Mary Herrick	15	Wenham	Afflicted		Fate unknown
Abigail Hobbs	14 (possibly 12)	Topsfield	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Convicted and condemned September 9; reprieved, pardoned 1693	Hobbs troubles the claim that children were saved by their age, and that confessed witches were not hanged; married, two sons; lived in Wenham
Edward Hooper	15	Andover	Accuser		Accused Dorcas Hoar; died before 1708

Stephen Johnson	13	Andover	Accused/ confessed	Imprisoned 5 weeks; released on bail	Johnson was accused by his mother; fate unknown
Mary Lacey Jr.	15/18?	Andover	Accuser/ afflicted/ accused	Imprisoned; released on bail	Married 1704; fate unknown
Abigail Roe/Row	15	Gloucester	Arrested		Fate unknown
John Sadie/Sawdy	13	Andover	Afflicted?/ accused	Imprisoned; released on bail October 6	The only surviving records are the evidence of Mary Osgood that she had afflicted him and the recognisance for his release; died 1702
Hannah Tyler	13	Andover	Accused	Tried, found not guilty: one of the few children to be tried during the trials	There is some doubt over Hannah Tyler's age; she may be confused with Johanna Tyler in some records
Sarah Wilson Jr.	14	Andover	Afflicted/ accused/ confessed	Imprisoned; released on bail January 13, 1693	Fate unknown

In Table 1.2, the 13–15 age group represents the largest group of accused children, with relatively few accusers in this group. By far the majority of the accused were from Andover and, as was the trend at this point of the trials, most of the Andover children were known to have confessed to witchcraft. Again, each of these children survived their imprisonment.

There are two anomalies in this group. The first is Elizabeth Colson from Reading. The first indictment for her arrest was issued on May 14; but she escaped to Boston where she remained hidden for over three months, despite multiple accusations against her in her absence and repeated efforts to find her. She was finally captured and sent to prison on September 14; she was to remain there until May 1693, unable to pay her prison expenses. She was 15 at the time of the first arrest warrant but was 16 by the time of her capture. Her case will be discussed further in Chap. 4.

The other standout figure in this list is that of Abigail Hobbs, a child who could be argued to disrupt much of what we know—or think we know—about the involvement of children in the Salem witch trials. Hobbs, like Colson, was neither from Salem Village nor Andover like most of the accusers and accused; rather, she was from Topsfield. She was also accused early in the proceedings, unlike most of the Andover children although not dissimilarly to Dorcas/Dorothy Good. Most importantly, as a confessing child—Hobbs confessed to far more than the usual implications of the mother and/or people that had already been accused by others, as was the case with the Andover children—she was the only under-18 and one of the very few confessors of any age who was convicted and condemned; she survived only because of the termination of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, thus troubling the assumption that children were not hanged in Salem. She will be discussed in detail in Chap. 6.

**Table 1.3** Accused, accusing and afflicted children (age 16–17)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
Elizabeth Booth	16	Salem	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Daughter of Henry and Rebecca Wilkins; married George Booth in 1692
Sarah Bridges	17 (possibly)	Andover	Accused	Imprisoned; acquitted January 1693	Died after 1723
John DeRich	16, possibly 18	Salem	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused Giles Corey, George Jacobs Sr., and others	Married 1698; fate unknown
Mary Fuller Jr.	17	Ipswich	Accuser?	Witness against Rachel Clinton	Fate unknown
Sarah Godfrey	16		Accuser		No information in Rosenthal et al.
Mary Herrick	17	Wenham	Accuser/ afflicted		Fate unknown
Elizabeth Hubbard	17	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Married 1711; fate unknown
Margaret Jacobs	16	Salem?	Accused/ accuser/ afflicted	Accused parents and grandfather but recanted; tried January 1693 and found not guilty	Married 1699; died after 1718
Elizabeth Knapp	16	Groton	Accuser/ afflicted		No information in Rosenthal et al.
Abigail Martin	16	Andover	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Died 1768
Lydia Nichols	17		Accuser	Accused Abigail Hobbs and John Willard	Fate unknown
Sarah Proctor	16	Salem	Accused	No surviving record of indictments against her	Daughter of John and Elizabeth Proctor; married 1700; died after 1712

*(continued)*

**Table 1.3** (continued)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
William Proctor	17	Salem	Accused	Three indictments returned ignoramus	Son of John and Elizabeth Proctor; died after 1712
Samuel Shattuck Jr.	16	Salem	Afflicted?	'Bewitched'; Rosenthal et al.	Died 1695
Martha Sprague	16	Boxford	Accuser/afflicted	Accused many	Married 1701; fate unknown
Martha Tyler	16	Andover	Accused/ confessed	Arrested and imprisoned	Cleared May 10, 1693; fate unknown
Mary Walcott	17	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Fate unknown
Daniel Wilkins	17	Salem Village	Afflicted/ accuser	Taken ill in 1692; witchcraft confirmed as the cause	Died 1692; John Willard accused and arrested
Frances Wycomb	17	Rowley	Afflicted/ accuser	Accused Martha Scott	Died 1750

In Table 1.3, the 16–17 age group contains more accusers than accused, and the greatest concentration of afflicted girls: only one male accuser appears in this group, although accusations were primarily made on his behalf by other family members. However, the geographical concentration is much more dispersed, with accusers deriving from Boxford, Groton, and Wenham in addition to the usual Salem Village and Andover. And, of course, the designation of these individuals as 'children' becomes ever more problematic. My decision to include this age group and some of the individuals in the following group under the heading of 'children' derives principally from the October 6 removal of children from jail before the winter of 1692/93: 18 children were released on bail, including 18-year-old Richard Carrier. Mercy Wardwell, who had turned 19 three days previously, was left in jail.

In Table 1.4, including over-18s in any discussion of childhood is even more problematic than the previous age group; however, each individual



**Table 1.4** Accused, accusing and afflicted children (age 18-plus)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Notes and fate</i>
Richard Carrier	18	Andover	Accused/ confessed/ accuser	Imprisoned; released on bail; tortured to confess	Carrier was tortured during the court proceedings; married 1694, died 1749 Fate unknown
Margaret Knight	c. 18?		Accuser		
Mercy Lewis	19	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Regularly included in discussions of the ‘afflicted children’; bore a child before marriage in 1695 Fate unknown
Abigail Martin	18	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	
Susannah Sheldon	18	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted	Accused many	Regularly included in discussions of the ‘afflicted children’; probably died before 1897
Mary Warren	20	Salem Village	Accuser/ afflicted/ accused/ confessed	Afflicted, recanted, afflicted again, accused, arrested; accused many	Regularly included in discussions of the ‘afflicted children’; death date unknown
Mercy Wardwell	19		Accused	Arrested; confessed	Married 1697, died 1754

named here has been included in discussions of childhood in Salem, either in contemporary sources or, more usually, in histories of the trials; see Chap. 2 on the afflicted and Chap. 4 on the accused in particular for further details.

There are multiple conclusions we can draw from this information, if we choose to do so. Many of these will not be new. We already know that most of the accusers—particularly those who accused multiple adult and child ‘witches’—came from Salem Village; we also know that most of the child ‘witches’ came from Andover, that they confessed and accused others, and that they implicated members of their own (extended) families, both those who had already been accused by others and supplying new names. We learn that only one child was convicted: the fact that she was

**Table 1.5** Total afflicted/accusing children aged 17 and under

	<i>Total</i>
Children age 12 and under	7
Children age 13–15	5
Children age 16–17	15
<i>Additional children who were also accused</i>	
Total of all accusing children under 18 (except accused)	27

**Table 1.6** Total accused children aged 17 and under

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total tried</i>
Children age 12 and under	8	1
Children age 13–15	12	4; 1 guilty
Children age 16–17	4	1
Total of accused children under 18	24	6

Sources: Rosenthal et al., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*; Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic and Religion*; Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials*; Diane Foulds, *Death in Salem*; and Richard Hite, *In the Shadow of Salem*

Note: Where sources differ on age, I have used the data given by Rosenthal et al. unless otherwise stated. Abigail Hobbs is included as both accuser and accused as she accused so many and was tried and found guilty of witchcraft. Had she been younger, Mary Warren would also have been featured in both lists

also an accuser, though this was also the case with the majority of the other accused children, did not save her from conviction and neither did her young age. However, we also learn that a total of six children were tried, a statistic that has not previously been discussed in histories of Salem, to the best of my knowledge; I will discuss this further in Chap. 4. We also learn that while some children accused a vast array of Essex County residents, others accused only one or two. And we learn that most child ‘witches’ were accused by other children, although sometimes also by adults, with one or two exceptions.

But what does any of this information actually tell us? Does it serve to divide childhood from adulthood still further, thus rendering Salem’s

children as something we know and can quantify? Or can we use it, rather, to consider not just the scale but the relative importance of children's involvement in the trials? To consider this further, we need to turn our attention to the only means by which we know anything of the trials at all: the question of the language and linguistic representation of childhood.

### THE LANGUAGE OF WITCH-HUNTS

In reading narratives of Salem, whatever their genre, one must contend with the issue of language to consider how it both represents and occludes any knowledge of the events of 1692. In her analysis of the correlation of language with our understanding of witchcraft, Diane Purkiss claims:

The term 'witch' did not have a single meaning to which all writers and speakers had recourse; its meaning was a matter of contestation. 'Witch' meant differently to different speakers, illustrating gulfs in gender and education, class and beliefs, becoming a site on which other meanings could be contested, on which class and religious differences could be played out.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, the past tense here is irrelevant: the definition of a witch encounters the same problems today as in the early modern era, although the variations may have shifted in the intervening centuries. However, the question of what a 'witch' was and is needs consideration as much as the question of what constitutes and constituted childhood: as Purkiss claims here, both are constructed and reconstructed in language according to the writer/speaker and, as such, neither can be stabilised either in language or in history.

The language of extant court documents is our primary source in determining the status of Salem's children and of witches. In the first examination of the legal stage of the process, that of Sarah Good on March 1, 1692, John Hathorne asked Good, 'why doe you hurt these children'. The leading question structure was established from his first two questions; this third question established the accusers as children.<sup>48</sup> The recorder, Ezekiel Cheever, paraphrased further: '(H) desired the children all of them to looke upon her, and see, if this was the person

who hurt them and so they did looke upon her and said this was one of the persons who tormented them.’<sup>49</sup> As such, it was the official language of the court that designated the afflicted as children, at least at the beginning of the trials. The first three apprehensions were for Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn, and Parris’ servant Tituba, who were accused of harming Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam Jr., and Elizabeth Hubbard, and this language that designated the afflicted as children continued through the examinations of Tituba and Osborn.<sup>50</sup> Yet in the March 19 warrant for the arrest of Martha Corey, 19-year-old Mercy Lewis was described as a ‘single woman’ and Ann Putnam Sr. had joined the accusers; thus Corey was asked ‘tell me now why you hurt these persons’ at the outset of the record of her examination rather than ‘these children’.<sup>51</sup> However, both Corey and Hathorne returned to constructions of the accusers as children as the examination progressed. Hathorne asked: ‘Tell us who hurts these children’, while Corey admonished: ‘We must not beleive all that these distracted children say.’<sup>52</sup> These two examples from early in the trials show how the ‘afflicted girls’ came to be named as such, their status as children confirmed despite the presence of at least one married woman and two teenagers of 17 and 19 years, each of whom could variously be argued to destabilise this definition. And such linguistic claims were to have a significant impact both during the trials and on historical and fictional constructions of childhood in Salem since that time.

Constructions of language therefore played a key role in the trials, and necessarily continue to do so in forming our understanding of the events of 1692, as each historian, critic, and novelist both engages with and translates through language as they interpret and rewrite the witch panic. Yet, as Perry Miller claims in his brief discussion of the Salem witch trials: ‘after 1692, not only is the episode seldom referred to, but the word witchcraft almost vanishes from public discourse’; likely due to Governor Phips’ ban on publications regarding the trial in October 1692, a ban that stayed in force for some six months, although also perhaps due to a fear of engaging with the subject. Miller adds: ‘Still, it is difficult to see clearly and objectively just what was involved; language itself proves treacherous, and analysis rebounds on the analyst.’<sup>53</sup> There is an assumption here that language should be stable—indeed, that it might be so in other situations—but in Salem it is ‘treacherous’ and ‘rebounds’, leading us into misapprehension, thereby both attacking us and implicating us

within our own analysis. Purkiss further claims both ‘the inadequacy of textuality in the face of such an event’ and that ‘the texts do not “make sense”; they cannot be read except as unreadability itself’.<sup>54</sup> Both claims are certainly relevant to any investigation into narratives of Salem’s children. After all, and as we have already seen, Salem’s children are only ever constructed and reconstructed in language; and the allocation of status as guilty or innocent plays a large role in that very construction. Yet it is a construct that can never be stable. Purkiss, for example, argues that ‘the witch-craze has been a synonym for pointless persecution’; yet most witch hunt narratives do the same, aiming to fix blame for the trials and their outcome on a certain group or cause in order to render the accused as innocent.<sup>55</sup> From hysteria to ergot poisoning, from Indian raids to factionalist local politics centred around the choice of minister, each history aims to ‘solve’ the case of Salem, and each—no matter its conclusion—thereby reinstates the guilt/innocent binary in which someone must take the blame.

A browse of the index of *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* is a case in point when considering such instability of language as applied to Salem’s children. Rossell Hope Robbins’ work discusses children accused of witchcraft in sections on specific witch trials—Mora, for example—but does not give these children an entry to themselves. Yet Robbins does assign ‘Children as Accusers’ a two-page entry, beginning: ‘During the centuries of witch-hunting, hundreds of people were sent to their death because of the wanton mischief of undisciplined youngsters. England was especially afflicted with such little monsters, and American children copied their antics.’<sup>56</sup> This is clearly not an objective view of children’s roles as accusers; yet it does bear closer analysis. ‘[W]anton mischief’ suggests intent but, coupled with ‘sent to their death’, the intent itself seems uncertain: was this mere child’s play, or was the intent to kill? This assumption of intent is problematised further by the claim to the children as ‘undisciplined’: in assigning blame, are the children guilty for failing to discipline themselves, or has a lack of parental or other adult discipline allowed these children the license to carry out their ‘wanton mischief’? The claim to ‘little monsters’ who ‘afflicted’ England and were ‘copied’ by American children seems to suggest that the children are to blame, as does much of the subsequent entry; as such, children in Robbins’ construction also

work to trouble legal understandings of childhood. Should these children be judged as self-reliant and as fully responsible for their own actions, as Robbins appears to do here? Or is the language applied to childhood as difficult to interpret as the childhood it is ostensibly describing? Miller's claim that 'language proves treacherous' seems ever more apt.

Language is central not only to later understandings of the trials but also to accusations of witchcraft and trial evidence. The language of women and children in particular became a method of accusation and admission of guilt, with the oft-repeated motifs of 'muttering'—believed to signify the saying of a spell or curse, as in the case of Sarah Good—and writing in the devil's book to secure a binding contract, an inversion of Christianity but one that also highlighted the precarious status that non-male adult writing held in a patriarchal society. Education in 1692 Salem was not simply restricted to men and boys, however, as Stacy Schiff points out: 'Piety correlated to literacy; especially in religious homes, mothers taught the children, servants, and slaves of the house to read.' But while many could read, Schiff adds: 'Writing came later, if it came at all.'<sup>57</sup> The 'signatures' of the afflicted girls in court documents bear witness to her claim, with many represented by crosses or other non-linguistic marks. The depositions, too, were not written by the girls but by men, frequently Thomas Putnam, father of Ann Jr. While this does not signify a lack of writing ability in the younger children—rather, a further claim to the subordinate legal status of children in court, though one troubled by the acceptance, even encouragement, of their testimony by means of demonstrating their afflictions during examinations—it does show a mediation of the accused girls' voices by adult men and a certain formularity to the documents, with key claims repeated across accusations and between accusers. As such, reading these documents as children's testimony or even accurate reflections of their experiences as they understood them is problematic.

Further, the language of guilt and innocence has become key to our understanding of the trials as it was key to the trials themselves, with their whole purpose to determine the respective guilt and innocence of the accused if, rarely, of the accusers, although the focus in late- and post-trial writings shifted almost entirely to this question. After all, the trials revolved around claims of innocence by accused witches, the desired guilty

confession and implication of the guilt of others, and the question of whether the devil could assume the shape of an innocent person. But the later assumption of the wholesale innocence of the accused and condemned meant that guilt had to be assigned somewhere: often in the direction of the accusers and judges. Yet the linguistic question of innocence remains: could an innocent person be guilty? What would it therefore mean to be innocent? Is innocence the same as being innocent *of* something? Could a person believing themselves to be innocent be a witch without knowing it? Could the judges be guilty of such wholesale murder if they were following the law and the written Biblical teachings of the church in their firm belief in the existence of witches? And could the accusing girls be guilty of murder if they were below the age of criminal responsibility in such cases as these, either as it was understood in 1692 or in terms of twenty-first-century laws? Linguistic claims to guilt and innocence remain as slippery now as they did then.

As such, the close analysis of language will play an important role in this study. Court records, histories, and literary texts will be examined with equal rigour to determine how the children of Salem are constructed, not just in terms of their roles in the trials but in their status *as* children, to discover how accusers and child witches are constructed and reconstructed under this tide of blame and redemption. If it is the case, as Katherine Howe claims, that '[h]istories of witchcraft have often revealed more about the time in which the historian was writing than about witchcraft itself', the question might be asked: can we reliably locate the child within Salem's witch crisis at all?<sup>58</sup> And do the variety of constructions of the child within narratives that encompass contemporary recordings, critical analyses, and fictional rewritings trouble any attempt to find the 'truth' of the events of Salem in 1692?

## NOTES

1. Kate Kellaway, 'The Week in Theatre: *Macbeth*', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/mar/25/macbeth-christopher-ecclestone-review-rsc-the-great-wave-plough-stars-agnes-colander> [accessed 27 April 2018].
2. Alex Wood, 'Did the critics see red over the RSC's *Macbeth*?', *WhatsOnStage*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.whatsonstage.com/stratford-upon-avon->

- [theatre/news/critics-rsc-macbeth-review-roundup\\_46093.html](http://theatre/news/critics-rsc-macbeth-review-roundup_46093.html) [accessed 27 April 2018].
3. Paul Taylor, 'Macbeth, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, review: Powerful, but new ideas are hit-and-miss', *The Independent*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/macbeth-royal-shakespeare-theatre-review-a8266826.html> [accessed 27 April 2018].
  4. William Shakespeare (1603) *Macbeth* (Wordsworth Editions, 1992), Act 1, Scene 3, p. 35. Of course, Banquo's quote also destabilises claims to an appropriateness of age as well as of gender performance, and renders both a matter of interpretation in an interesting comment on perceptions of childhood, witchcraft, appropriateness and performance. See Diane Purkiss, 'Witchcraft in Early Modern Literature', *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft* ed. Brian Levack, (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 122–140 for further discussion of childhood in *Macbeth*.
  5. Lyndal Roper (2012) *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press), p. 155.
  6. A 1998 review of *The Wizard of Oz* reads: 'Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first person she meets and then teams up with three strangers to kill again'; Marion Gibson (2006) 'Retelling Salem stories: Gender politics and witches in American culture', *European Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 85–107, 90.
  7. Consumption is at the heart of many portrayals of witchcraft, but in *Hansel and Gretel* in particular, everyone wants to eat something—or someone. See Introduction, *Hansel and Gretel in The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. Maria Tatar, pp. 179–184 for further discussion.
  8. 'You're the cleverest witch of your age I have ever met, Hermione': J. K. Rowling (1999) *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing), p. 253.
  9. Adriana Mather, *How to Hang a Witch* (New York: Ember, 2016).
  10. Christopher S. Mackay (ed.), *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 368–369.
  11. Brian P. Levack, 'The Horrors of Witchcraft and Demonic Possession', *Social Research*, Vol. 81, No. 4, Winter 2014, pp. 921–939, 923.
  12. Ellen Castelow, 'The Pendle Witches', *Historic UK*, <http://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-Pendle-Witches/> [accessed 26 January 2018].
  13. King James I (1597) *Daemonologie* (Bishop Aukland: Parchment Books, 2012); Michael Dalton (1618) *The Countrey Justice*: <https://archive.org/details/countryjusticeco00dalt/page/n6/mode/2up> [accessed 1 April 2020].



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17. Lyndal Roper, "'Evil Imaginings and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze", *Past & Present*, No. 167, May 2000, pp. 107–139, 166.
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19. Hale in Burr, p. 413.
20. Emerson Baker expands on the 'perfect storm' metaphor at length in (2015) *A Storm of Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
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22. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (2011) *Children in Culture Revisited: Further Approaches to Childhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 1.
23. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836) 'Nature', *Nature, Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co), p. 78.
24. Erica Burman (2008) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 14. While I agree with Burman that Darwin's study is widely accepted as the first such study of early childhood, significant work was being done in this field much earlier, including New England's Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May), who recorded his studies of his infant daughters across a number of largely unpublished volumes.
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26. Joanne M. Ferraro (2012) 'Childhood in Medieval and Early Modern Times' in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. Paula S. Fass (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 61–77; all references in this paragraph from p. 61.
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29. Fleming, p. 61.

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36. Smith, unnumbered.
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38. Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, pp. 53–54.
39. William Wordsworth (1802) 'My Heart Leaps Up', *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (London: Wordsworth Poetry Library), p. 91.
40. Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, p. 59.
41. Rosenthal et al., p. 248.
42. Rosenthal et al., p. 246.
43. Rosenthal et al., p. 199.
44. See Chap. 6 for detailed discussion of Abigail Hobbs.
45. Hite, pp. 150–151.
46. Rosenthal et al., p. 844.
47. Purkiss, p. 74.
48. John Hathorne's first two questions to Sarah Good were: 'what evil spirit have you familiarity with?' and 'have you made no contract with the devil'; Bernard Rosenthal et al., ed. (2009) *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 127.
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53. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, Harvard, 1983), p. 190.
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55. Purkiss, p. 15.
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57. Stacy Schiff (2015) *The Witches* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown & Co), pp. 134–135.
58. Katherine Howe, ed., *The Penguin Book of Witches* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. xi–xii.



## CHAPTER 2

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# ‘Bitch Witch’: Childhood and Affliction

## A LANGUAGE OF AFFLICTION

Accusations of witchcraft against both children and adults in Salem were made primarily by those termed in courtroom documentation as ‘the afflicted girls’ or ‘tormented children’, and much of the focus on children in histories and other narratives of Salem has attempted to determine the role these children played in the instigation and severity of these trials as opposed to others in America’s history of witchcraft. Such narratives ask: who were they? What role did they play? How were they perceived at the time of the trials and how might we perceive them in hindsight? And how can we understand them within a construction of what childhood is or what we expect it to be? This chapter therefore aims to consider the implications of the terminology of guilt and innocence in the trials and their aftermath as they related to those termed ‘the afflicted girls’, noting how language constructs the guilt/innocent binary that resulted from the trials and that has shaped narratives of the panic until the present day. I also consider the language of ‘performance’ so often applied to the girls, one that frequently separates the assumption of innocence from that of guilt, and examine how narratives have shifted since the time of the trials. Finally, I consider how such a constant replaying of the trials—in attempting to assure who is innocent and who, therefore, guilty—is based on our need to assign children certain roles in society and how the ‘afflicted girls’ have

come to represent both an adult idealisation of childhood and a fear that we might be wrong.

In considering representations of the afflicted girls in narratives of the trials, we only really have one source to rely upon: that of written language. After all, there are no audio recordings or courtroom video recordings from which we might attempt to interpret intonation or body language; although such methods would be, after all, simply another form of reading, and thus no more stable or reliable in any search for the truth of an event. Yet written language has its own characteristics: for example, writing down words spoken by someone else only works as a retrospective recording of language that is other than itself, leaving room for interpretation from the writer as well as the reader, with such recordings always subject to the speed of writing and the impossibility of recording every word; to mishearings, to misunderstandings or misinterpretations; to the writer's ability to pick and choose what is recorded and what is not, and to paraphrase; as well as to add their own thoughts on what was said. And in terms of the afflicted girls, who have split public opinion from the inception of the trials through to attempts to understand their role in the present day, language is more crucial than ever; after all, like the diagnosis of witchcraft in their apparent sufferings by (it is largely assumed) Dr. William Griggs, the language of affliction derived from the adult world rather than from those frequently designated as 'children' who were apparently suffering its effects. We also therefore need to consider, in each narrative and between narratives, how the terms 'afflicted' and 'affliction' might work, to see if such claims can have any stability and if they have impacted on changing views of those that were categorised by them.

As has been discussed briefly in Chap. 1, the accepted 'beginning' to the Salem witch panic dates from January 1692 with the experiences of and, crucially, the subsequent adult interpretations of what was happening to Betty Parris and Abigail Williams in the household of Salem Village minister, Samuel Parris; with these two girls the first children to be so afflicted if not, yet, termed the 'afflicted girls'. Our knowledge of these events comes not from any textual representation by Betty or Abigail but from adult witnesses: writings by Samuel Parris, Deodat Lawson, and John Hale in particular, written and published variously during and after the events. From the outset, therefore, any understanding we might claim to have of the children's affliction is subject to a division between adult and child, and to the adult need to interpret what seemed beyond logical interpretation both at the time and retrospectively in writing. Such

documents tell what these 'afflictions' consisted of according to the adult (and male) gaze: pinch-like pains, strange speech, twisting of the child's body; we also know that a diagnosis that the two girls were 'under an evil hand' was not reached immediately, with other avenues of illness and explanation considered first. Under pressure from their adult questioners, Betty and Abigail eventually named as witches those who they claimed afflicted them: Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn, and Tituba, a Barbadian slave living and working in the Parris household. As such, their evidence of witchcraft was directed by the questions asked them, much as later testimonies of both adults and children would be in court.

Many further instances of affliction followed those of Betty and Abigail, with children across Salem Village, Salem Town, Andover, and beyond claiming to experience strange physical symptoms and that said symptoms were caused by witches, often who came to them in spectral form with the aim of tormenting them into participating in the devil's work; that is, to become witches themselves. While it may not be possible to identify how, when, and where the term 'afflicted' was first used in 1692, its use expanded as the group of those exhibiting similar symptoms grew concurrently. As Emerson Baker claims in his chapter, 'The Afflicted': 'Though beginning with one group of friends, the numbers of the afflicted rapidly grew outward. Soon there were twelve, next sixteen, and then eighteen suffering, in a community of just six hundred people.'<sup>1</sup> But what does 'afflicted' mean? Baker constructs the term as a kind of contagion or infection beneath which the sufferer is a passive victim; as opposed to recorded instances of *maleficium* in which the victim is usually known to the witch and has been targeted directly, this affliction spreads between the victims with no apparent intervention outside of the infection itself, apart from through the pre-existing bonds of friendship and 'community'. To be afflicted is therefore also to be the afflicter, even if by default rather than design as appears to be the case here.

And this medicalised discourse is not unique to the hindsight of historians. In 1692, Hale wrote his observations of the two girls: 'Sometimes they were taken dumb, their mouths stopped, their throats choacked [...] so as might move a heart of stone to sympathize with them, with bowels of compassion for them'; to which claim historian Anna Mae Duane comments: 'Satan seems particularly invested in keeping children quiet'.<sup>2</sup> This quote from Hale, and its more recent response, both participate in a medicalised discourse, but with a tension between Duane's claim to 'keeping children quiet' and the testimonies of the afflicted in and out of the

courtroom, although it is also the case that the girls were taken dumb and/or deaf at times, according to court records. Further, Hale's appeal to the body—to the heart and the bowels—is predicated on his assumption of a sympathy for the girls that went beyond him, one that creates more of an empathy in which the body as well as the mind of the observing adult would be affected and therefore implicated in what was being witnessed and its pseudo-medical language.

Such claims signify a medicalised discourse that has been applied to the afflicted girls, both in 1692—in the linguistic claim to 'affliction'—and more recently in claims to infection and disease as possible causes; for example, the much-disputed but largely discredited possibility that ergot poisoning caused the girls' symptoms. As such, affliction and those afflicted are each pathologised but are also simultaneously excused through the allocation of the passive role of the sick. While such pathologisation temporarily removes the pattern of accusation away from any intent to infect others, this cannot be and is not sustained because, as an explanation or even mitigation of guilt, it is only ever a repetition of a previous failure: a failure to understand. As such, medicine as we understand it in 1692 Salem is relegated to something beyond and below reason, almost to the level of superstition: after all, the 'diagnosis' that the girls were 'under an evil hand' was made by a doctor and yet, despite its spread, this disease never once proved fatal; at least, not to the afflicted. Therefore, we might question if such claims to the girls' apparent bodily sufferings are framed through medicine in order to dismiss early modern medicine—in Salem, at least—as so much quackery. After all, the language of disease fails on both sides, with both the disease of affliction and the disease of witchcraft since argued out of existence, with both predicated on intent in their narrative pathologisation, even if it is an intent that can only be guessed at and never known. Witches are therefore positioned as a source of affliction/infection through attempts to find the source, and therefore a 'cure', for the necessarily innocent children suffering under its effects.

But if the term 'affliction' was so nebulous and was applied to a shifting but increasing number of people, who were those known in history as the 'afflicted girls'? While we might argue that anyone who claimed harm through supernatural means and malefic intent might qualify, the use of this term in contemporary documentation and historical reflections on the Salem trials is curious in that it is most frequently limited to just a small group of the dozens of accusers, particularly the young people of Salem

Village who were among the earliest and most frequent accusers. Hans Sebald comments, in similar medicalised terminology to Baker's that acts to position the girls as outside intent, that 'the strange contagion spread, like a contagious disease, to other young people in the community, enveloping with particular ferocity eight supposed ringleaders ranging in age from twelve to twenty: Ann Putnam, Elisabeth Hubbard, Mary Walcott, Mary Warren, Elisabeth Proctor, Mercy Lewis, Susan Sheldon, and Elisabeth Booth'.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, neither Betty Parris nor her cousin Abigail is named as afflicted (although the inclusion of Elizabeth Proctor appears to be an error, perhaps mistaken for Elizabeth 'Betty' Parris, Abigail is definitely not here): even though the first two afflicted girls are the apparent source of the affliction, they are not counted among its ringleaders, perhaps because both exited the trial proceedings by the end of June 1692, although not without accusing others before their family removed them from the scene. Equally interesting, perhaps, is the tension in Sebald's claim between 'ringleaders' and 'the strange contagion [...] enveloping' these eight named girls and young women, for in his description, the status of these eight as 'ringleaders' predated their susceptibility to the 'contagion' that enveloped them and rendered them passive. This is important in that it introduces the key question which has kept the afflicted girls in the public consciousness and troubled the basis of the trials from the outset for some participants and observers: the question of free will versus passivity, of whether the afflicted girls deliberately and knowingly sent so many people to their deaths or if this was an effect of something other, such as an illness as already discussed; the political machinations of adults; or inter- and intra-family conflicts, for example. Yet despite the apparent passivity of the disease analogy as it is described here, Sebald's term 'ringleaders' also suggests a possibility of performance and direction, of the deliberate recruitment of others into the circle of affliction and accusation and, as such, an even more aberrant role in that the eight named girls must therefore be guilty not just of wholesale murder but of making others either murderers themselves or accessories to these murders. It is also relevant to note that, although Sebald discusses the afflicted in terms of 'young people', each of those 'people' named here is female. While this might be expected in that very few boys claimed affliction in the same way—John Sadie, John DeRich, and Daniel Wilkins are the only three under-18 afflicted boys that I have been able to trace with any confidence—it also might trouble any designation of the afflicted as 'children' with the term usually working across sex and gender rather than



designating only one such representation. It also matters given later exploration of the girls' roles in which explanations such as hysteria, a female lack of agency, and a frustrated desire for marriage and sex are offered; explanations rarely attributed to male behaviour and motivation in or beyond claims to affliction and witchcraft.

So why name these eight in particular out of all the afflicted girls and young women? Why are the other 20 or so accusing children not included in the list? And where is the similar terminology of affliction and/or disease for others made into witches by mothers, friends, and neighbours, such as were presented in the confessions of Andover's children later in the proceedings? Were they not also 'afflicted' by others, despite their confessions to their own involvement in witchcraft? The principal difference appears to be that the afflictions of these eight were regularly seen in public, most notably in court and therefore documented, and that they accused the greatest number of people while largely escaping such accusations themselves, despite their aberrant behaviour. Ann Putnam Jr., one of the most prolific accusers and one of the first to be afflicted outside the Parris household, was named in 53 legal complaints between January and June; Mary Walcott was named in 69 complaints against those she accused of afflicting her; and the accusations of each of the others named here were instrumental in each of the deaths that were to follow.<sup>4</sup> And while very few formal complaints against the 45 accused residents of Andover survive, the accusation of the town's Martha Carrier by Susannah Sheldon, Ann Putnam Jr., and Elizabeth Hubbard, followed by the invitation of two of Salem Village's afflicted girls by Joseph Ballard to Andover to seek out any witches that might be responsible for the illness of his wife, Elizabeth, resulted in a geographical and numerical explosion in witchcraft accusations and imprisonments. Perhaps it is therefore due to their status as instigators of the trial proceedings (rather than cases of affliction) and the geographical spread of accusations that these names in particular crop up most frequently: not just because these girls were in court from the beginning but in that they directed and changed the very nature of the legal proceedings. After all, as Baker points out, '[t]hese people temporarily turned the legal system on its head, with marginalized elements of society (unmarried and female) dominating the courtroom in giving testimony and accusing respected adults in the most famous trials in early American history'.<sup>5</sup> It is the unprecedented nature of their actions; in the recording of their names, actions, and words (problematic though those recordings might be); in children acting against adults; and in their role in so many of

those adults' deaths, that the status of the 'afflicted' has been secured by history.

### THE 'AFFLICTED GIRLS' IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

The first entry of the afflicted girls into contemporary records came in the court reports via the warrant for the apprehension of Sarah Good, followed swiftly by the joint warrant for Sarah Osborn and Tituba, each from Monday, February 29, 1692. Good's warrant names Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam Jr., and Elizabeth Hubbard (often recorded as Hubert), all of Salem Village, not as accusers but as those to whom 'much Injury [was] done' by 'Suspition of Witchcraft by her Committed'.<sup>6</sup> As such, those repeatedly named by Judge John Hathorne as 'children' were positioned passively at the outset, as the 'afflicted', with no outright accusation from the girls but only an adult suspicion of correlation between cause and effect.<sup>7</sup> Yet the second warrant, despite being issued consecutively, took a different approach, directing Constable Joseph Herrick thus: 'You are likewise required to bring at ye same time [as Osborn and Tituba] Eliz. parris Abigl Williams Anna putnam and Eliz. Hubert. or any other person or persons yt can giue Euedence in ye abouesd Case'.<sup>8</sup> As such, the named children and any others able or willing to speak to the witchcraft accusations were required by the court to attend to give evidence. Far from their passive victim status in the first warrant, here the afflicted were not just invited but directed to speak in accordance with a legal document. The testimonies and the voices of children were given both space and weight by an adult court of law, and they were actively encouraged to bridge the gap between afflicted and accuser. In this way, the testimony of these four afflicted girls in particular was granted equivalent legal status to any that might be given by adults, and were even actively privileged above those unnamed 'other [...] persons' who may or may not have been admitted.

Yet, despite Duane's claim that, '[f]aced with communal enemies invested in "stopping" children's mouths, children's speech in Salem became valued in remarkable ways', the voices of these four afflicted girls, and others, remain curiously occluded in both court and contemporary documents, and their status continues to tiptoe along this line of division between innocent victims and legally-bound accusers, with occasional digressions into what would become their later status as malefactors themselves; and also along the assumed divide between children and adults.<sup>9</sup> In

Sarah Good's March 1 examination, for example, John Hathorne positions the afflicted as innocent, as children, and as a group, asking Good: 'why doe you hurt these children'.<sup>10</sup> The 'children', according to the document, complied with this direction and spoke as with a single voice: '(H) desired the children all of them to looke upon her, and see, if this were the person that hurt them and so they all did looke upon her and said this was one of the persons that did torment them. presently they were all tormented.' Nowhere in this document are the children named, so we cannot be sure if all the invited children were present at Good's examination and if others were also present and accusing, afflicted, or both at this time. The 'children' speak with one voice but no name, their reported group-speech mediated through the language of court reporter Ezekiel Cheever.

While Good follows Hathorne's lead and does not differentiate between the girls (although others, subsequently, do such as in Tituba's naming of Betty Parris), both she and other accused witches troubled the status of the afflicted girls in other ways. For example, in denying she hurt the children—'I doe not hurt them. I scorne it'—Good implies that they are lying or misled in their accusations; as does each accused witch who denies the charges against them, if even by default rather than turning the accusations against them onto the afflicted.<sup>11</sup> Others were more outright than Good in their repudiations of the afflicted children's assumed status as innocent victims. Martha Corey was the first, admonishing the judges: 'We must not beleive [sic] all that these distracted children say'; thus positioning the children as both liars in their accusations and as victims of 'distraction' or mental illness.<sup>12</sup> On May 2, during Dorcas Hoar's examination, she claimed: 'Oh! you are liars, & God will stop the mouths of liars', thereby assuming not only evil intent but full knowledge of it in the afflicted girls.<sup>13</sup> And such language was not confined to the courtroom, with afflicted young woman Sarah Churchwell reporting in her testimony on June 1 that her master, George Jacobs, had called her 'bitch witch & ill names'.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the girls' testimonies garnered plenty of adult support too, principally through those adults also claiming affliction, among them John Indian, Sarah Bibber (or Vibber), and particularly Ann Putnam Sr. Even as an assumed boundary between 'child' and 'adult' wavered and was sometimes lost—during Rebecca Nurse's trial, for example, Hathorne referred to Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Hubbard as 'these grown persons' and referred to afflicted girls including 12-year-old Ann Putnam Jr. as 'single woman', whereas elsewhere they were grouped under the afflicted

'children'—the testimony of an adult was still assumed to carry more weight than that of a child alone.<sup>15</sup>

Hathorne rarely wavered in his belief in the status of the girls as afflicted according to extant court reports and his later refusal to apologise for the trials as others, including judge Samuel Sewall, did; yet his question to Martha Corey—'Do you believe these children are bewitcht'—admits the possibility of some other explanation.<sup>16</sup> This is expanded in the examination of Rebecca Nurse, on March 24, when Hathorne asks: 'Do you think these suffer voluntary or involuntary [...] if you think [...] it is by design [you] must look upon them as murderer[s]'.<sup>17</sup> As such, while the legal system appeared to support the assumed innocence of afflicted girls to the end and beyond, that doubts were being expressed from an early stage is evident in the language of the courtroom. After all, the entire validity of the legal process hung on this question: not were the girls mentally ill, or suffering from the contagion of disease or what would later be named as hysteria, but were they lying and, if so, were they murderers? As such, the guilt/innocence binary applied to the afflicted girls—one that was necessary to secure any convictions at all—was in trouble throughout the proceedings.

The language of the accused and the judges was not the only means by which the afflicted were represented in court: much of what we know or can surmise about these 'children' can be found in the depositions that bear their names, dating from the first surviving deposition of the afflicted girls, Elizabeth Hubbard vs. Sarah Good on March 1, 1692, to the deposition of Mercy Lewis against Philip and Mary English, Lydia Dustin, Elizabeth Johnson Jr., and Thomas Farrar Sr. on January 12, 1693.<sup>18</sup> The last surviving deposition by an under-18 appears to be that of Elizabeth Hubbard, aged 17, against 15-year-old Abigail Row (or Roe), Esther Elwell, and Rebecca Dike on November 8, 1692.<sup>19</sup> As has been recorded and discussed in a number of Salem histories, the majority of the depositions of Salem's afflicted were not written by the girls but by adult men, frequently relatives: Ann Putnam Jr.'s complaints, for example, were largely penned by her father, Thomas Putnam, who also spoke for many of the afflicted girls, resulting in depositions that were by and large copies of each other. For example, in their separate depositions against Sarah Wilds written by Thomas Putnam, both Ann Putnam Jr. and Mary Walcott stated: 'Sarah willds did most grievously torment me dureing the time of hir Examination'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the majority of the depositions of the afflicted girls spoke of both their torment during the examinations—which would

be attributed to one witch or another as appropriate, although with similar or the same language—and their afflictions before the time of the examinations, which sometimes contained more detail, such as when Mary Warren claimed that John Proctor ‘hath often tortured: me by penching. me. and biting me and Choakeing me and presing. me one my. stomach. tell the blood Came out of my mouth’; but were often the same or almost so.<sup>21</sup> As such, while the depositions had their desired effect—to speak to the guilt of the accused witch—they also positioned the afflicted girls in multiple ways: as victim, as accuser, and as vocal in their testimonies while silent in the eyes of the law on paper, requiring an adult to give written language to their experiences, a language that frequently diminished and flattened any individuality of real, imagined, fantasised, or illness-inspired experience.

One further way in which the afflicted girls are represented in court is through the reports of their actions in the courtroom during the examinations of suspected witches. In many—indeed, most—of the earlier examinations, the afflicted girls were not only present in court but, according to records of the proceedings, they were active participants. For example, during the examination of Abigail Soames on May 13, ‘Upon the glance of her Eye she struck Mary Warren into a dreadful fit att her first appearance’; similarly with Abigail Faulkner Sr. on August 11: ‘When she was brought into ye room, ye afflicted persons fell down’.<sup>22</sup> More detail was given on other occasions, through reported speech as well as description of a group action or effect: during Rebecca Nurse’s March 24 examination, for example, ‘Ann Putnam in a grievous fit cryed out that she hurt her’, while ‘Nurse held her neck on one sid & Eliz. Hubbard (one of the sufferers) had her neck set in that posture Whereupon another Patient Abigail Williams cryed out set Goody Nurses head the maids neck will be broke’.<sup>23</sup> The language of this particular account is interesting with its connections between action and speech; its claim to Abigail Williams and others as a ‘Patient’, thereby medicalising their sufferings and again rendering them passive victims; and in 12-year-old Williams’ positioning of 17-year-old Hubbard as a ‘maid’. These accounts of actions and voice in the afflicted girls continue the dichotomy of victim and accuser discussed previously, but also position their accusations as both verbal and physical, with bodies and voices combining to accuse each witch; although, again, we only have access to these through the language of the adult recorder. One final note on this point can be garnered from the examination of Abigail Hobbs: two notes were appended to her examination of 19 April, explaining that ‘The

afflicted, i. e. the bewitched persons were none of them tormented during the whole examination of this accused & confessing person Abigail Hobbs'; and, 'After this examination Mercy Lewes, Abigail Williams, & Ann Putnam three of the sufferers said openly in Court, they were very sorry for the condition this poor Abig. Hobbs was in: which compassion they expressed over & over again'.<sup>24</sup> While the content of these notes is interesting in and of itself, and shall be discussed as such in Chap. 6, the main point here is in the recording of the absence of fits in court: it was unusual enough to be commented upon in the official records, even if this was not the point of its recording at the time.

Although the court records constitute our primary access to contemporary adult opinions on and the (occluded) voices of the afflicted children, contemporary reports from outside and beyond the courtroom also offer a perspective on Salem's positionings of the children, as commentators during and immediately after the trials struggled to find a way to explain what was happening. After all, despite the differing perspectives on the roles of the afflicted during the trials already discussed, it was not until very late in the legal process that any serious claims were raised against them, when they began to accuse their social superiors of witchcraft, including a 'worthy gentleman of Boston' who threatened a defamation suit.<sup>25</sup> One commentator on the role of the afflicted and beyond was, of course, Cotton Mather. While Mather the Younger is known to most who are familiar with the trials, and to any wider historian of New England Puritanism, his history regarding children and witchcraft is worth recounting in brief. Mather's role as defender of the trials and of witchcraft's existence in general had been honed some years before the Salem trials began, particularly through his experience with the Goodwin children of Boston in 1688, as recounted in his *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, published in Boston in 1689. In this account, Mather details the both the case itself and his involvement: in brief, 13-year-old Martha Goodwin accused her father's housekeeper, Ann Glover, of stealing laundry, with the resultant argument allegedly causing Goodwin and her three siblings to fall ill in such a way that, much like Dr. Griggs in Salem Village four years later, the attending doctor diagnosed witchcraft. When Glover was hanged for her supposed crimes, on November 16, 1688, she is widely reported to have said that her death would not release the children from their malady. This proved to be the case, and Mather took it upon himself to take Martha into his home to study the phenomenon in more detail.<sup>26</sup> While there are many differences

from the events in Salem—particularly in an assumption of the relevance of Glover’s Catholic beliefs to her accusation and execution—this event apparently justified Mather’s belief in witchcraft and subsequent interest in the involvement of children in Salem’s witch trials four years later.

The events of Salem (at least, as far as they had reached at the time of writing and according to his perspective) were recounted in Cotton Mather’s October 1692 book, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, later satirised and debunked by Boston merchant Robert Calef in his *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. This text is relevant to a discussion of childhood in the witch panic because, although Mather recounts some of the examinations at which the children were undoubtedly present and considers both their testimonies and their actions at these events, he does not position them as children at all. One example is in the examination of former Salem minister, George Burroughs, one of the most unexpected of the witchcraft executions due to Burroughs’ high social and religious status as a minister and in his non-residence in Salem at the time of the trials. In ‘The Tryal of G. B., at a Court of Oyer and Terminer, held in Salem in 1692’, Mather states: ‘Accordingly several of the Bewitched, had given in their Testimony, that they had been troubled with the apparitions of the two Women, who said, that they were G. B.’s two Wives, and that he had been the Death of them’. Similarly, he adds:

G. B. being now upon his Tryal, one of the Bewitched Persons was cast into Horror at the Ghost of B’s two Deceased Wives then appearing before him, and crying for Vengeance against him. Hereupon several of the Bewitched Persons were successively called in, who all not knowing what the former had seen and said, concurred in their Horror of the Apparition, which they affirmed that he had before him.<sup>27</sup>

The most interesting aspect of this account for this analysis, apart from its sensational content, is that Mather does not identify any of the ‘Bewitched Persons’, despite the court documents clearly listing Ann Putnam Jr. and Susannah Sheldon as those who ‘Testifyeth that his 2. Wives and .2. children did accuse him’.<sup>28</sup> While we cannot know why Mather chose to occlude the identity of the afflicted nor to signify that they were children—did he see them as such? Is this a second-hand account from which he was unaware who accused Burroughs?—the effect is to validate their testimony as ‘Persons’, as adults; there is no hint here or elsewhere that Mather did not fully believe in the testimony of the afflicted children, as

he had believed in that of Martha Goodwin and other child victims as recounted elsewhere in his *Wonders*.

On the other side of the divide, Brattle's October 1692 letter professed his lack of belief in the innocence of the afflicted girls—or, indeed, in the truth of the afflictions themselves—at some length, paving the way for later interpretations of their actions, with Calef and, later, Charles W. Upham, the first significant historian of the trials, following his lead. In one of his many diatribes against the afflicted girls, Brattle commented:

I cannot but admire that these afflicted persons should be so much countenanced and encouraged in their accusations as they are [...] it is worthy of our deepest consideration, that in the conclusion, (after multitudes have been imprisoned, and many have been put to death,) these afflicted persons should own that all was a mere fancy and delusion of the Devil's [...] if, I say, in after times, this be acknowledged by them, how can the Justices, Judges, or any else concerned in these matters, look back upon these things without the greatest of sorrow and grief imaginable?<sup>29</sup>

This account concerns this analysis primarily because, although Brattle does not hold back on his opinion that the afflicted girls were clearly faking, here and elsewhere in the letter, his concern is rather with the fact that they are believed by adults and particularly by adults with the power of life and death over others. Even his hope that the afflicted might one day 'own that it was all a mere fancy and delusion of the Devil's'—a combination of deliberate over-imagination leading to murder and demonic influence under which they would, surely, be as innocent as any other 'witch'—is targeted at a similarly desired soul-searching by the justices and judges, one that would result in great remorse rather than any practical restitution for what Brattle judges as their gullibility. In this statement, then, the adults are not to blame: even any future guilt they might feel could only be triggered by an admission of culpability from the afflicted children (who, we might surmise, are unlikely to still be children themselves at this fantasised point in the future). Such a judgment renders these girls in terms of the Biblical Eve, committing a worse crime by seducing others into wrongdoing than simply in taking that step themselves and thereby rendering them more damned than any adult wrongdoing could be. No matter that Brattle problematises their status as children, as discussed in Chap. 1: the divide remains here between the guilty afflicted and the adults whose principal crime is to believe them.



## FROM 'NATURALLY INNOCENT' TO 'EVIL CHILDREN'

Karen Renner's work on evil children in film and culture may not be about Salem or about historical events at all; yet Salem's history is littered with the same language of playacting, fiction, and narrative as Renner's analysis, and Salem's afflicted girls are indeed created and recreated by the 'popular imagination' as much as by the rigorous work of historians. Discussing her investigations, Renner claims:

What I ultimately came up against was the contradiction that stumps the legal system time and time again, at least in countries like the USA and UK: when awarding rights to children, we err on the side of caution, believing them not responsible enough to vote, drink, or serve in the military. However, when children commit crimes, we often want to hold them responsible, believing that they must understand the differences between right and wrong and can act accordingly. Children are thus constantly held to a double standard that views them as too young to be trusted but old enough to know better. In turn, our rules and laws depend on a fantasy concept of The Child, who is so unwise and vulnerable as to need our protection and guidance but so naturally innocent and good as to be incapable of serious wrongdoing. The Child can never exist in reality, and neither can the Evil Child. To be truly evil, a child would have to be capable of mature intention and responsible decision-making, but would such a child still be a child?<sup>30</sup>

Renner, similarly to Brewer as discussed in Chap. 1, is interested in the legal status of children both in terms of criminal wrongdoing and what she terms their 'rights'. Yet, in staying with the contradictions rather than attempting to resolve them, Renner exposes what she terms 'the fantasy concept of the child', one that must be applied to the 'evil child' as much as its assumedly innocent counterpart. However, in doing so, she still buys into a binary view of childhood in which the child must be one thing or the other, innocent or evil, leaving no room for any ambiguity or lack of volition on the child's part: his/her status is a decision, one that troubles any claim to a natural innocence if such innocence can and must be chosen. This view of childhood is one seemingly accepted by many commentators on the Salem panic, enmeshed as they and we frequently are in the binaries of 'solving' the trials in which many have been discovered as innocent, meaning that someone—some group—must be guilty in order to render the trials a miscarriage of justice and to understand how they

occurred with the aim of avoiding any repetition of such horror. As such, with the innocence of the accused assured by the aftermath of the trials in which all those convicted (if not necessarily all who were accused) were officially exonerated, the guilt must lie elsewhere; a guilt that is not, this time, for the crime of witchcraft but for initiating and presiding over the unnatural and unnecessary deaths of so many innocent people. In claiming such a binary view of the 'evil child' and its morally innocent uncanny shadow-twin, however, this is not to say that guilt and innocence are not tricky subjects: to be guilty of one crime does not mean that one is guilty of all crimes; neither does innocence of witchcraft necessarily make one an innocent person. Indeed, even in the trials themselves, many of those we now understand to be innocent confessed their guilt in lengthy and graphic detail. Rather, such claims are predicated on the adult need for the child to be known: to be what we want it to be or to be dismissed and/or punished for its aberrance.

As such, the treatment of the afflicted girls throughout history is worthy of continued attention. Many, indeed most, historians of the trials have attempted to unravel the afflicted girls' roles and motivations in their accusations and testimonies, with explanations (as we have seen) varying from hysteria to ergot poisoning, from inter- and intra-village factionalism to the impact of the Indian wars and, of course, the explanation that the girls were, quite simply, evil. As Rosenthal comments: 'It would take a large bibliography indeed to compile a list of all the works written to explain the bizarre behaviour of the female accusers at Salem'; although, as he claims, 'a very small one to explain that of the males'.<sup>31</sup> What is more important to this analysis, however, is the continued investment at the base of all of these claims; that is, the adult investment in understanding the child as that which it positions as other to itself. But there is more than this at stake in the continued focus on Salem's 'afflicted girls', some of which is predicated on our twenty-first-century acceptance of the Romantic or sentimental child. As Viviana A. Zelizer has explored at length in her book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, childhood is never fixed but rather depends on a continually reworked adult interpretation of what it actually is at any given time in history.<sup>32</sup> Of course, such an interpretation depends on more than just history: class, race, economic status, and endless other factors are involved in our response; and yet, in the majority of the western world at least, twenty-first-century views of childhood remain rooted in an understanding of Renner's 'natural innocence' and Zelizer's sentimentally valued child. As such, the afflicted children appear to lie beyond our ken,

with responses varying from the need to deny any possibility of evil in children to the need to assign blame somewhere in order to solve the trials to our satisfaction; and these narratives therefore continue to construct and deconstruct what a child should be through what they figure as varying degrees of deviance from an assumed childhood norm, and opinion remains deeply divided among historians as to the importance of the afflicted girls in the trials and to their associated guilt or innocence.

It is, of course, impossible to consider each representation of the afflicted girls in Salem's many histories, and so I will instead discuss a selection, beginning with Upham's influential 1867 work, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects*, in order to consider textual constructions of the afflicted. Upham claims:

It is almost beyond belief that [the afflicted girls] were wholly actuated by deliberate and cold-blooded malignity. Their crime would, in that view, have been without a parallel in monstrosity of wickedness, and beyond what could be imagined of the guiltiest and most depraved natures. For myself, I am unable to determine how much may be attributed to credulity, hallucination, and the delirium of excitement, or to deliberate malice and falsehood. There is too much evidence of guile and conspiracy to attribute all their actions and declarations to delusion: and their conduct throughout was stamped with a bold assurance and audacious bearing. With one or two slight and momentary exceptions, there was a total absence of compunction or commiseration, and a reckless disregard of the agonies and destruction they were scattering around them.<sup>33</sup>

Upham's account is vitally important for our understanding of how the afflicted children are positioned through language for a number of reasons: firstly, it positions the afflicted girls as largely culpable, thereby impacting on most future studies as, even when later historians have disagreed with his analysis, it is Upham's account that most frequently needs to be debunked. Further, Upham positions the role of the afflicted girls as important in the trials and our understanding of them, and again it is his reading that needs to be—and frequently is—endorsed or rejected. In this account, Upham also takes his reader on a journey from his seeming and qualified disbelief that a child could deliberately act to destroy another human life, through a number of possible explanations, to arrive finally at what seems a well-considered response that Renner's 'evil child' does, in fact, exist in the multiple incarnations of Salem's afflicted girls.

To consider Upham's language more closely, his positioning of the afflicted girls results largely in their status as both liminal and conditional: 'it is *almost* beyond belief'; 'their crime *would*'; 'how much *may* be attributed' [my emphases]. He also offers either/or scenarios which he is unwilling to resolve despite the construction of a binary choice: 'I am unable to determine how much may be attributed to credulity, hallucination, and the delirium of excitement, or to deliberate malice or falsehood', with the claim to 'unable' positioning their actions beyond his ability to comprehend. Yet despite the girls' position as between the two statuses of passive and active, there is no other option at this point than to endorse one or the other in any final reckoning. While this might be attributable to Upham's reluctance to commit given insufficient evidence, it also renders the girls as both unreadable and as unreadability itself, as that which cannot be pinned down or known in and by language. Yet Upham still favours a belief in their guilt above a belief in, if not their innocence as such, then at least their susceptibility to behaviour that would lead them to what he terms a 'monstrosity of wickedness', a 'crime', and what would be carried out by the 'most depraved natures'. He notes that there is 'too much evidence' to explain away their behaviour as beyond conscious decision; that 'their conduct was stamped with a bold assurance and audacious bearing'; and that their behaviour was marked by 'a total absence of compunction or commiseration' and 'a reckless disregard of the agonies and destruction they were scattering around them'. These claims are devastating in that Upham chooses to base the guilt of the afflicted girls on their 'bearing'—his own perspective based on the perspectives of those who recorded their words and actions inside and outside of the courtroom—and what he reads as 'absence' and 'reckless disregard', thereby reading what he expects to be present and condemning the girls based on its absence, even though he has set the standards for these expectations himself. The language of these claims therefore works to demonise the girls—to render them 'evil children' in comparison to a desired or normative childhood—perhaps more effectively than any outright condemnation could do, for in seemingly giving them the benefit of the doubt Upham, as so many others were to do after him, gives the appearance of a fair trial when his mind is already made up; much as the judges did with the accused witches of Salem. As such, Upham set the bar for a continued replaying of the trials in historical analysis, but in endorsing the assumed innocence of the accused witches, he has chosen instead to place the afflicted girls on trial; and there they remain to this day.

Marion L. Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts*, published in 1949, also investigates the afflicted girls from the perspective of knowledge gained in the aftermath of the trials, in the scholarship of the intervening centuries, and through the lens and associated language of her own times, and reaches a similar conclusion to Upham as to the guilt of the girls, therefore both replaying the trials and echoing his testimony. Starkey comments:

The tragedy [...] originated in the childish fantasies of some very little girls and was carried on to its deadly climax by what one might now call a pack of 'bobby-soxers', were not the term pictorially incongruous. It was largely these older girls, who, inflamed by the terrors of Calvinism as their immature minds understood it, depressed by the lack of any legitimate outlet for their natural high spirits, found relief for their tensions in an emotional orgy which eventually engulfed not only their village but the Massachusetts Bay Colony.<sup>34</sup>

Further, Starkey claims: 'Some of the [afflicted] girls were no more seriously possessed than a pack of bobby-soxers on the loose', and describes them variously as 'the she-brats', 'a pack of lying girls', and 'crazed little girls'.<sup>35</sup> The language in these examples focuses on certain assumptions. The first is that of gender: they are 'girls', and despite the variations in age between the 'very little' and the 'older', Starkey implies a lack of responsibility or of maturity through both age and gender, one that is highlighted further by her claims to a deliberate misleading through 'lying', 'brats', and the denial of a serious possession; at least, for 'some of the girls', which begs the question of whether Starkey believes that others were, in fact, 'seriously possessed', and by what. There is a further denigration of the 'afflicted' here with the repetition of 'pack' and the claim that they were 'on the loose'. The 'girls' are therefore also animals as, in choosing a route away from moral responsibility and emotional maturity, they have regressed beyond even the childhood that is still being claimed for them to drop to the inferior status of animal in Starkey's configuration. Concurrently, 'girl' might be read here as animal in a wider sense than that of the afflicted: after all, the Salem accusers themselves are not 'a pack of bobby-soxers on the loose' but being compared to these in terms of a claimed possession, with teenage girls across the centuries therefore subject to this judgment in Starkey's narrative. Starkey also splits the group between the 'very little girls' with whom the panic originated and the 'older girls' who were 'largely' responsible for the ensuing rounds of

accusation and trial. While this split is also discussed in other histories, the assumption is often of young adulthood in those Starkey categorises rather as both 'older girls' and, if problematically, 'a pack of "bobby-soxers"'. As such, she retains the assumption of childhood in the 'immature minds' of the older girls, despite the split from their younger sisters, while also positioning their response to such pressures as aberrant and prematurely sexualised in her claim to a resultant 'emotional orgy'.

However, in the extended passage, Starkey does apportion some of the responsibility, if not exactly the blame, towards wider Salem society. While the girls may have been responsible for the actions they chose to take, the catalyst for those actions could be traced to the repressive Calvinist Puritan society in which they lived. The girls possessed 'natural high spirits' for which, Starkey leads us to understand, some outlet was required; in not providing any suitable outlet, adult society must therefore bear some of the responsibility for what the girls 'found' instead. In comparison to Upham's analysis, then, Salem's adults are not simply gullible dupes of the evil witch children, to be pitied rather than blamed, but are implicated by a lack of proper care in Starkey's reckoning, even if one that is positioned as passive rather than active.

Frances Hill also pathologises the afflicted girls through an assumption of their guilt but offers a different take to Starkey on the degree of, and reason for, adult culpability. She claims:

In certain social and psychological conditions all empathy is destroyed and there is only a furious desire to hurt, even kill. In naming Dorcas [Good], and the other accused witches, the afflicted girls indulged to the full those impulses that are more often overt in the furious young—children and adolescents who have been overcontrolled or unloved or otherwise made to feel worthless—than in their more socialized elders.<sup>36</sup>

In Hill's narrative, the finger of blame is pointed with some conviction at 'the afflicted girls' in the claim to knowledge of an intent 'to hurt, even kill' and in the indulgence of 'impulses' that are 'more overt in the furious young'; with the repetition of 'furious' here and in the following excerpt working to position the afflicted girls as aberrant, angry to the point of excess, and beyond any attempt at self-control, much akin to Starkey's 'emotional orgy' in its self-indulgence no matter the cost to others. But, beyond this claim, Hill's allocation of blame begins to widen. While the girls are accountable for their actions and their decisions, the desire

itself—as with Starkey—stems from ‘certain social and psychological conditions’ that are located outside of the girls and are beyond their immediate control. Similarly, Hill argues that such impulses are seen more frequently in children subjected to certain treatment from their elders, particularly an excess of control or a dearth of love. These claims of too much and/or too little of what is constructed as a correctness in the treatment of children therefore shifts at least some of the blame to Salem’s parents. Hill expands on this point further:

We cannot know whether the furious children of Salem believed the available excuse for sending people to their deaths. Without question the adults did. [...] Through the mouths of their wild, merciless children the people of Salem guiltlessly condemned those they wished to see dead.<sup>37</sup>

In this argument, the children are that which both can and cannot be known by the narration that positions itself as other to them: ‘[w]e cannot know’ what they believed. Yet ‘we’ know that they are ‘furious’ and ‘wild, merciless’, and that they are simultaneously malleable and therefore paradoxically controlled, available to be used by those adults who ‘[w]ithout question’ knew what they were doing, who manipulated their children into settling old scores, and who effectively murdered without guilt or blame at the time if not in these later narratives. In both of these excerpts from Hill’s work, adults are not Upham’s weak and controllable men, nor Starkey’s failed parents and elders, but rather—like their children—actively evil, using those children to seek revenge on neighbours and murdering without impunity. In Hill’s view, murder is a family affair in which adults and children are equally guilty and is akin, therefore, to the pattern of witchcraft accusation in Salem in 1692. There was evil in Hill’s Salem, but it went by the name of truth, while the accused were innocent by default.

One major trope in historical treatments of the afflicted girls is that of play-acting, a claim that even preceded the Salem trials to surface in earlier witch trials. Cotton Mather, in his *Memorable Providences*, discussed his perspective on the afflicted Goodwin children of Boston: ‘In a word, Such was the whole Temper and Carriage of the Children, that there cannot easily be anything more unreasonable, than to imagine that a Design to Dissemble could cause them to fall into any of their odd Fits.’<sup>38</sup> Although Mather is denying the possibility of the afflicted playacting, he has still imagined the scenario and set it out for his readers: in denying it, he has therefore caused the return of the very suspicion that he is attempting to

quell and expanded its reach via his readership. There is also an assumption here that such potential deceit could be seen, by adult eyes, especially and primarily by Mather's own. Under such a claim, there is no need for interpretation: the visible is all, and this record therefore acts as a precursor for the admittance of spectral evidence to Salem's courtrooms, with the assumption that what is seen is real just as applicable to the seeing of children as of adults.

Sebald considers Salem's afflicted girls as acting in his interestingly named book, *Witch-Children: From Salem Witch-Hunts to Modern Courtrooms*; interesting in that his account of Salem focuses solely on those who were rarely ever positioned as witches—the afflicted girls—and ignoring all the children accused of and confessing to witchcraft. Sebald claims:

The girls' affliction was not only public knowledge, but also public spectacle. Their seizures were not limited to the family setting, but could be seen and heard at court hearings, where they regularly attracted a large audience—an audience, it must be emphasized, mostly sympathetic to the girls, considering them innocent martyrs of wicked spells. And here we have arrived at the key concept: the audience. It was and is the sine qua non of the enactment of possession. There is no possession on record that took place in private, with an audience absent. An audience would provide the girls with the right cues to start acting. If no audience was present, or if the audience failed to give the right cues, such as failing to show signs of credulity, the girls' acts either shrivelled pitifully or didn't materialize at all.<sup>39</sup>

This passage focuses on the relation between the afflicted girls and the 'public': those who were, at any given time, not directly involved in the court proceedings but were drawn in by their status as onlookers and witnesses. However, throughout this section and others, in which Sebald calls the girls 'talented actresses', he constructs the trials in terms of theatre: the trials were 'public spectacle' which attracted 'a large audience', a claim in which the public's status as audience appears to predate their appearance in court; as if they had been waiting, patiently, for a show—any show—to begin.<sup>40</sup> In these repeated claims to 'audience'—particularly in positioning it as the 'key concept'—might also be read an assumption or conferring of status onto the audience as a single body: Sebald's audience saw one thing and heard one thing, with no individualism to split or question what was seen. Further, he constructs a relation of interdependence between



afflicted and audience in which not only is the audience positioned *as* audience by the ‘enactment of possession’ by the afflicted, but the afflicted also cannot function *as* afflicted without the agreement and participation of the audience, who would ‘provide the girls with the right cues to start acting’. As such, this audience is complicit in the assumed guilt of the afflicted girls, while the judges apparently sit outside of both groups, as passive and gullible as previously assumed by Brattle. Yet there is a sense in which the relationship between afflicted and audience is fractured: in Sebald’s claims to ‘absent’ and ‘failure’ lies the possibility of a failure of affliction and of the girls themselves, separated from each other by the vagaries of the audience, while Sebald’s claims to ‘with an audience absent’ and ‘if no audience was present’ situate the audience as simultaneously present and absent throughout.

Of course, Sebald’s constructions of affliction as theatre here depend on an assumption of the guilt of the afflicted girls in terms of a fabrication of evidence of which they were fully aware. Yet the assumption of the audience’s complicity, even if a complicity that was never secure or reliable in this first passage, is troubled at a later stage as Sebald states:

The curtain came down on a drama in which the stars had played their roles with lethal skill and so convinced the audience that it confused stage with reality. As the play ended, the audience realized their confusion and dispersed, embarrassed, contrite, and with a parting feeble attempt at restitution.<sup>41</sup>

As such, while the afflicted girls’ status as actors is secure across Sebald’s discussion of the trials, the audience are both willing and knowing participants—actors themselves, in a sense—and unwilling dupes who ‘confused stage with reality’, even if the claims to contrition and a qualified ‘restitution’ assume some lingering guilt and responsibility by default. Therefore, while Sebald’s construction of the guilty status of the children remains unquestioned, he also points the finger at those adults who should have known better but did not; but in doing so, he doubles the guilt of the afflicted in that not only did their acting have ‘lethal’ results but they ‘duped’ those who should have been able to stop them; again, they exist as the temptress Eve against the representative adult male Adam. In reading childhood through this passage, it is the afflicted who are credited with nearly all of the power: they may need the audience for this power to be fully realised, but they remain both authors of the script and actors

whose intention was always to avoid their status as actors being seen at all. Sebald's constructions of theatre, then, can only ever be situated as such after the event: at the time, any widespread suspicion of playacting would have halted the trials in their tracks if the girls indeed possessed the power attributed to them in this account.<sup>42</sup>

In each of these histories—and other histories are available that decline to lay blame with quite so much emphasis on the afflicted girls, even as these accounts are troubled by the role of adults—we need to consider the implications of both the positioning of the girls as 'evil children' (even if only 'in the popular imagination') and the investment in replaying the trials that allows them to be judged in this way but with the afflicted on trial rather than the accused of 1692. In assuming that witchcraft did not in any way exist and that the accused were all innocent, the approach is never to assume that the trials, imprisonments, and executions were just a massive miscarriage of justice in which circumstances came together to create Baker's 'perfect storm'; rather, we replay the trials with the children, the judges, and Sebald's 'audience' at their centre as opposed to the accused in order to resolve the unresolvable, to discover what really happened, and to assign blame in its proper place. Despite Brewer's contention that: 'The child-as-criminal still presents dilemmas for us today. If a child cannot have mens rea (criminal intent), how can the child's potential threat to society be met? To what extent should a child be responsible for a criminal act?', the afflicted girls are rarely tried as children in this court of popular opinion but as adults, with full awareness of their actions and the likely implications, even if occasionally those girl-adults are subject to hysteria, conversion disorder, or other illnesses: the assumption is still that it is right and just that these children are tried and, more often than not, found guilty.<sup>43</sup>

## AFFLICTION IN FICTION

Naturally, in this building of a legend, the afflicted girls have been co-opted to play a starring role in fiction, plays, and poetry based on the trials, especially in fiction for young adults.<sup>44</sup> One such example is the 1982 novel, *Witches' Children* by Patricia Clapp, which tells the story of the afflicted girls and their role in the trials; as with Sebald's title, Clapp's title positions the afflicted girls within a relationship to witchcraft that appears at odds with their status in Salem's trials. This fictionalised account of the trials is narrated by Mary Warren who, Clapp tells us, 'was a little older

than most of them, old enough, as John Proctor said, “to have a little sense in your head”.”<sup>45</sup> As such, Clapp acknowledges the variation in age of the girls while her title still announces their status as ‘children’; no matter that their status as ‘witches’ children’ is never fully explained within the text.

Clapp’s account of the trials is relevant to this analysis for three principal reasons. The first is in its initial refusal to assign blame to the afflicted girls due to what is frequently figured as a conscious decision to harm others; rather, Clapp tells how the girls were weak: ‘young girls are more given to feelings than reason’, states Warren as Clapp’s narrator, talking from a position in the future through the past tense of ‘I was’, with her narrative situated post-trial and when this fictional Warren was, assumedly, an adult.<sup>46</sup> Clapp also continues to figure the afflictions as some kind of group hysteria or contagion, in line with many historians as already discussed. However, this claim to passivity does not negate Clapp’s construction of the girls’ culpability, even if it is only partial. The fictional Ann Putnam Jr. states: ‘The Devil cannot do all his work alone, he must have others to aid him—and who better than a child who looks young and innocent, and can do her work unsuspected? Surely that might be the Devil’s choice?’<sup>47</sup> Further, Warren figures their afflictions and their resultant accusations as a choice: ‘Even then we could have stopped. [...] And yet we would not stop.’<sup>48</sup> As such, the weakness of the girls may lead to their bad decisions and the wave of affliction that swept through their group and beyond, but they remain responsible for the decisions they make.

A further trope that Clapp explores in her work that has been discussed intermittently in histories, although most famously in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, is the sexualisation of the afflicted girls. Clapp figures the role of young female sexuality in her account largely through the character of her narrator, Mary Warren, and her erotic feelings for the adult and married John Proctor to whom she is bound in service. Warren claims: ‘I found my healthy, eager, developing body responding to John Proctor’s maleness’, and Clapp positions much of Warren’s admittedly erratic involvement in the trials as both accuser and accused as an attempt to gain Proctor’s attention.<sup>49</sup> Yet she also figures the need for these adolescent girls to find a romantic and/or sexual partner as a larger drive behind the behaviour of the afflicted girls: ‘there were at that time in Salem Village a great number of young girls and far too few men to wed them’.<sup>50</sup> In focusing on their sexuality in this way, Clapp either positions these girls as women, if young women, rather than the ‘children’ of the title, or within a Freudian

tradition of child sexuality that has rarely been discussed as a possibility regarding Salem's girls. Given the age of Mary Warren at the time of the trials, the prior explanation is more likely.<sup>51</sup>

One additional point of interest in Clapp's fictional or fictionalised work is her repeated insistence on the status of many of the initial afflicted as what she terms 'bound girls': those bound out to service and therefore living outside of the family home, of whom there were many in Salem and within Clapp's story. She comments, in Warren's voice: 'Elizabeth [Booth] was sixteen then, and Susanna [Sheldon] two years older, and both were bound girls as I was. I saw twelve-year-old Ann Putnam, a thin, tense child with enormous pale eyes, and Mercy Lewis, a rosy, happy girl who was bound to the Putnams.'<sup>52</sup> Clapp later recounts that Sarah Churchill (Churchwell) was bound to George Jacobs, and references their 'bound' status throughout. In returning to this status time and again, Clapp positions these girls' domestic status as outside the family home and as experiencing a curtailment of their freedom as part of their status as afflicted in that it impacted on or resulted in their place in the group dynamic. As such, Clapp appears to normalise it, at least within the group; yet in her repeated references, she also positions it as both unusual and as a potential trigger for the actions of these girls and the wider group. And, finally, the status of 'bound' again ties the afflicted girls into their relationships with adults; relationships that, despite the frequent accusations of their guilt, the girls are unable to escape.<sup>53</sup>

Another text seeking to understand the afflicted girls via an alternative textual route is Nicole Cooley's 2004 poetry collection, *The Afflicted Girls*.<sup>54</sup> Despite the focus of the title, the poems range through numerous aspects of the trials: poems are written in the voices of some of the afflicted girls—Ann Putnam Jr., Mary Warren, Betty Parris—but also from the perspective of accused child Dorcas/Dorothy Good, first confessor Tituba, and even those who Cooley terms 'The Mather Boys', in addition to other poems considering specific events or readings of the archive. As such, it might be argued that Cooley is troubling the notion of who, or what, constitutes the afflicted girls and—especially in the claim to the Mathers as 'boys'—what constitutes childhood.

However, much of the collection focuses rather on readings of language, voice, and silence. The titular poem, 'The Afflicted Girls', is a case in point, with its concern with the written and spoken word, with the language of the girls, and with their need for the male voice to ratify their own.<sup>55</sup> Cooley writes that the afflicted girls 'know what they want': it is

‘the refrain of men’s voices / saying their names’. With this, Cooley explores what she considers as the social position of Salem’s Puritan girl in 1692 and her relative status as powerless; yet she also hints at the sexualisation of the girls that is present in some historical accounts and more frequently in fictions of Salem, as discussed above. She further explores writing as its own form of power—the girls’ ‘accusations scrawl and climb / the surface in beautiful script’ in contrast to her repeated negatives concerning what they are usually barred from doing: ‘No girls in Salem Village are allowed to go to school. / No girls can hold a writing tablet on their laps’ and, additionally, ‘No girls hope for a place / in memory’. As such, Cooley focuses on the power that her afflicted girls have gained in and through language and, crucially, the acceptance of their language by the dominating males. She also constructs a usual Puritan girlhood—one that is without voice and without education—in order to subvert it through the afflicted girls. Yet, in her repeated assertion of ‘no girls’, she positions the afflicted as outside of girlhood as well as in and of its subversion: they cannot be ‘girls’ and retain their language. In considering constructions of childhood, particularly feminine childhood, Cooley—like many others—appears to be arguing that it is only in stepping outside of what is largely understood as a Puritan childhood that we can hear the voices of the afflicted girls. But again, as in the claims of many others, these voices are ‘a single voice’ and one that is under the girls’ control: ‘they know what they want: just this fury / of happiness’. There is no sense of adult direction or control in this account: Cooley’s afflicted girls are in charge.

### A DIFFERENT ENDING

One question that has been raised by historians, even if with no hope of an answer, has been what would have happened if one of the afflicted girls had died; if, in their claims to terrible afflictions, a child had perished of any means, natural or supernatural, during the process of accusation and trial. While of course we cannot ever know, it is worth considering the single case in which an ‘afflicted child’—that is, a child suffering under an illness that was claimed by others as affliction, as was frequently the case across the duration of the trials—actually died. Daniel Wilkins was 17 years old and living in Salem when he was taken ill. Hite comments:

[T]he [...] grandson of Bray Wilkins (who had complained of bewitchment by his granddaughter’s husband John Willard) died on May 16, 1692, after

an illness that left him gasping for breath at the end. John Willard, whom several members of the Wilkins family had accused of causing the illnesses of Bray and young Daniel by occult means, was arrested the same day or shortly after.<sup>56</sup>

While Willard was tried, condemned, and hanged on August 19, the extant indictments were all for afflicting Salem's afflicted girls, namely Mercy Lewis, Susannah Sheldon, Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Hubbard; although indictments five and six (of seven) are missing, Rosenthal et al claim that '[t]hey were probably for afflicting Ann Putnam Sr. and Mary Walcott', although they do not expand on what evidence this theory is based.<sup>57</sup> This lack of an indictment for Daniel's death is particularly curious given the inquest into his death noted 'seuerall bruised places upon the back'; the 'side of his neck and ear seemed to be much bruised to his throat'; and, crucially, 'we cannot but {Apprhend} but that he died an unnaturall death by sume cruell hands of witchcraft or diabolicall art'.<sup>58</sup> This document was signed by 12 jurors of the inquest after their examination of Daniel's body. Willard's potential role in Daniel's death figured in a statement made by George Herrick and Benjamin Wilkins against John Willard on May 16; in a further statement from Wilkins and Thomas Flint on May 18; and again by Daniel's father, Henry Wilkins, on June 2.<sup>59</sup> But this is the last mention of Daniel in the extant records, according to Rosenthal et al; indeed, they comment: '[T]here is no indictment against Willard for inflicting Daniel Wilkins, thus arguing against the idea that Willard was ever tried for his death'.<sup>60</sup> This seems curious given that it is known that documents are missing in Willard's case; yet his condemnation was not based on Daniel's death either.

I therefore want to consider both why Daniel's untimely death was not ultimately considered attributable to Willard's witchcraft, despite the recorded claims from the jurors at his inquest and Willard's subsequent execution for witchcraft, and Hite's recent consideration of Daniel's death: 'One shudders to think of the possible consequences if one of the afflicted girls had died while the examinations and trials were still ongoing'.<sup>61</sup> There is no suggestion in any of the records that Daniel Wilkins had appeared as 'afflicted' in court, thus rendering his sufferings outside of the performance-based afflictions of the girls as evidenced in court documents and positioned as such by historians such as Sebald; indeed, Daniel is not known to have claimed any correlation between his illness and Willard. Yet, as will be discussed throughout this work, visual confirmation—usually in the

form of spectral evidence—was considered as a claim to truth throughout the proceedings, despite the questioning of such evidence by several important men including, at a later point, Increase Mather. As such, would the conclusions of the jurors based on what they had seen, and the contemporaneous accusations and evidence of Daniel's family and others, been sufficient to convict Willard of murder? As will prove to be the case with other accusations, vital evidence is missing or unavailable; and this is also the case with any consideration of Hite's statement regarding the possible death of one of the afflicted girls: without such an occurrence, we can only conjecture, although any occurrence would necessarily have changed the course of the trials, rendering such a question moot in any case.

Yet we can consider, if only through conjecture, why Daniel's death might not have had the same impact as Hite's hypothesised death of an afflicted girl and why his case has not been much discussed in histories of the trials. As will be considered in Chap. 4 on the accused children, absence is difficult to quantify, and hypothesizing the replacement of one child with another is no less problematic for this and other reasons. Perhaps, then, what this case might show is how one child cannot ever be considered representative in Salem, and that the afflicted were never a homogeneous group with one voice, one experience, and one role in the panic. As the relative occlusion of Daniel's case and its inconclusive ending shows, the voices of the afflicted girls have always been given precedence over those of other children and adults, not through their own doing but through the adults who have enabled such readings of Salem's children that are always at the expense of others.

## NOTES

1. Baker, p. 99.
2. Anna Mae Duane (2010) *Suffering Childhood in Early America* (University of Georgia Press), p. 42.
3. Hans Sebald, (1995) *Witch-Children: From Salem Witch-Hunts to Modern Courtrooms* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books), pp. 69–70.
4. Norton, p. 321.
5. Baker, p. 99.
6. Rosenthal et al., p. 125.
7. Rosenthal et al. debate such an inclusion, commenting: 'Seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Hubbard continues to be included among "the children";

thereby positioning this as an anomaly, at least from a twenty-first-century understanding'. Rosenthal et al., p. 131n.

8. Rosenthal et al., p. 126.
9. Duane, p. 49.
10. Rosenthal et al., p. 127.
11. Rosenthal et al., p. 127.
12. Rosenthal et al., p. 144.
13. Rosenthal et al., p. 226.
14. Rosenthal et al., p. 353.
15. Rosenthal et al., p. 157.
16. Rosenthal et al., p. 146.
17. Rosenthal et al., p. 158.
18. Rosenthal et al., pp. 136, 776.
19. Rosenthal et al., p. 701.
20. Rosenthal et al., p. 218.
21. Rosenthal et al., p. 447.
22. Rosenthal et al., pp. 268, 542.
23. Rosenthal et al., p. 159.
24. Rosenthal et al., p. 192.
25. Roach, p. 307.
26. Cotton Mather (1689) *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A50139.0001.001?view=toc> [accessed 31 March 2020].
27. Cotton Mather (1692) *On Witchcraft* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 2005), pp. 101, 102.
28. Rosenthal et al., p. 241.
29. Thomas Brattle, 'Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692', in Burr, pp. 165–190, 183.
30. Karen J. Renner (2016) *Evil Children in the Popular Imagination* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan); p. 7.
31. Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692*, p. 56.
32. Viviana A. Zelizer (1985) *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
33. Charles Upham (1867) *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village, and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects, Part 3rd* (Cornell), pp. 4–5.
34. Starkey, p. 14.
35. Starkey, pp. 13, 46, 205–206.
36. Hill, p. 97.
37. Hill, p. 97.
38. Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences*.
39. Sebald, p. 71.



40. Sebald, p. 74.
41. Sebald, p. 76.
42. With thanks to Kirsty Sedgman for her discussion of audience studies and the courtroom with me.
43. Brewer, pp. 183–184.
44. They also, of course, form a major part of Arthur Miller’s play, *The Crucible*, but I will be looking at this text in some depth in Chap. 7 and so will not discuss it here.
45. Patricia Clapp (1982) *Witches’ Children* (New York, Puffin Books), p. 9.
46. Clapp, p. 13.
47. Clapp, p. 39.
48. Clapp, p. 49.
49. Clapp, p. 12.
50. Clapp, p. 12.
51. I will discuss the sexualizing of Salem’s girls further in Chap. 7.
52. Clapp, p. 26.
53. I will continue to discuss this in Chap. 5 on families and witchcraft, and throughout.
54. Nicole Cooley (2004) *The Afflicted Girls* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press).
55. Cooley, p. 9.
56. Hite, p. 85.
57. Rosenthal et al., p. 385.
58. Rosenthal et al., p. 278.
59. Rosenthal et al., pp. 281–282, 295, 361.
60. Rosenthal et al., p. 361.
61. Hite, p. 85.



## CHAPTER 3

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# ‘An Uncommonly Small Witch’: Narrating Dorcas/Dorothy Good

### NAMING AND NARRATION

In all the textual discussion of the afflicted girls across history and fiction, comparatively little has been said about those Essex County children who were accused of witchcraft, with the exception of one: Dorothy or Dorcas Good. This chapter will examine narratives of her role in the trials to consider the issue of her name and why it matters; to examine her status as both accused and accuser through different genres of narrative, and to consider how that disturbs an assumed binary between the two statuses; and to ask why and how this child in particular has become symbolic of a compromised and damaged innocence of the Salem witch child and determine how this designation is troubled by aspects of her history.

Sarah Good’s place at the forefront of Salem witch narratives is assured. As the first person arrested for the crime of witchcraft, her detention and subsequent trial marked the shift from the panic and confusion engendered by the afflicted girls’ behaviour and their subsequent diagnosis to the legal stage of the proceedings. She was an obvious suspect, in the context of European and earlier New England witch trials: poor, troublesome, given to mutterings and imprecations when she did not receive help from Salem Village’s richer residents and, under Puritan standards, suspect due to her non-attendance at church. As has so often been proved the case—although the Salem trials came to upset this dynamic as the accusations widened—it was those on the edges of society who were accused,

and often convicted, of witchcraft. At this stage, the accusations came from Elizabeth Hubbard, who claimed that Good had ordered a wolf ‘to pursue and to terrorize her or else had transformed herself into a wolf for the chase’.<sup>1</sup> Ann Putnam Jr. had also been tormented by Good, with pinches and attempts to make her sign Good’s book.<sup>2</sup> This evidence was enough to begin the tirade of accusations against Good that followed; only one unnamed man made any attempt to defend her, but his evidence was put aside.<sup>3</sup> Yet Good maintained her innocence until the end, and her defiance, right up to the point of her execution when—Calef has claimed—she shouted at Rev. Nicholas Noyes that he was a liar and that ‘If you take my life away, God will give you blood to drink’ is legendary.<sup>4</sup> Noyes’ death, 25 years later, during which he haemorrhaged and choked on his own blood, has been duly recorded by history.<sup>5</sup>

Good’s history is relevant to this analysis in that her story both reflected on and created that of her daughter, who was between four and five years old at the time of the trials, according to Lawson’s contemporary record. Little is known of the child, either before or after the trials, and records of her involvement are limited. According to Rosenthal et al., she appears in the surviving official records on some 16 occasions, most frequently in accusations of witchcraft made against her by other Salem children; in the examinations to ascertain her involvement; and regarding her eventual fate. She also appears, briefly, as an accuser. Yet her role in the trials is troubled, particularly with regard to her name. In the court records, she is mostly named ‘Dorothy’; the name ‘Dorcas’, Rosenthal et al. explain, was first used in error by John Hathorne in the March 23, 1692 warrant for her apprehension. Rosenthal explains: ‘Dorothy Good is erroneously called “Dorcas” in this warrant, a name that has become standard usage in histories of the Salem witch trials. Hathorne made the original error but recorded it accurately in subsequent documents.’<sup>6</sup> As Rosenthal points out, for one reason or another, historians and other writers on the trials have largely but not unanimously chosen the name ‘Dorcas’ over ‘Dorothy’, a decision that makes it difficult to select just one of these names and stick to it when discussing the child’s involvement in the trials: it is as if one were writing about two different girls. As such, I will use each name in the context of the text I am discussing: where a writer names her as ‘Dorothy’, I will follow this usage; ditto with her naming as ‘Dorcas’. My reasons for doing so are to avoid confusion—having attempted to choose one name over another while still quoting accurately, the narrative becomes hopelessly tangled—and to consider what is at stake in the

continued dual naming of this girl. After all, differences in spelling and naming occur elsewhere in the trial records too—and, as Rosenthal drily notes: 'On a number of occasions the first name of an accused female was not known by the accuser or authorities'—but this is perhaps the only case where such an 'error', as Rosenthal calls it, has provoked a measure of ongoing controversy.<sup>7</sup> In considering the 'why' of this critical reaction, I am not attempting to secure a resolution whereby the underlying intent behind each choice is justified or a single name is chosen as 'correct'; rather, I want to consider how the naming of Dorcas/Dorothy has become a battleground on which the recurrent attempts to secure an identity for Salem's witch children have been, and continue to be, played.

To summarise what we know, or appear to know, about Dorcas/Dorothy from the extant documentation, our best guess at her story is this: after the accusation against her mother, Sarah, at the beginning of the trial sequence, Dorcas/Dorothy was interviewed with regard to the charge against her mother, and confessed to becoming a witch herself after her mother gave her a familiar. Either before or shortly after this time, the accusing girls pointed their finger her way: Ann Putnam Jr., Mary Walcott, Mary Warren, and Mercy Lewis all testified against her; Samuel Parris later added his witness testimony to Dorcas/Dorothy's spectral attack on Mary Walcott. The warrant for her detention was issued on March 23—almost a month after her mother's February 29 warrant—and the record of her examination dates from March 24. She was examined again on March 26 by Hathorne, Corwin, and Higginson. The testimonies against her took place, variously, on March 24 (Putnam, Walcott, and Warren), April 8 (Lewis), April 12 (Parris), and May 12 (Warren again).<sup>8</sup> She was sent to Boston Gaol on April 10, although the *Mittimus* for her transfer dates from May 25; she remained there until December 10, 1692, when Samuel Ray undertook to pay a bond fee of £50 to allow her release on bail, with the condition that she appear at the next assize to be held in Salem. Rosenthal notes: 'Dorothy Good was freed and not subsequently tried'.<sup>9</sup> The account for payment submitted by John Arnold, Jailkeeper, reads: 'Dorothy Good 34 Weekes 4 Dayes from the 12th of April to the 10th of Decembe at 2/6 W 4//6//4'.<sup>10</sup> Her final two appearances in the court records occur in 1710 and 1712, both in claims for restitution from her father, William Good, for the loss of and damage to his family.<sup>11</sup> After this, Dorcas/Dorothy—like so many others—disappears from the record. Her subsequent place of habitation and the date of her death are unknown.

Like many of the children who succeeded her in the narrative—but have rarely gained the same degree of attention in narratives of the witch panic—Dorcas/Dorothy was both the accuser of her own mother and accused of witchcraft by others; like the majority of Essex County's accused children, she also confessed that she was a witch. We cannot know for sure if this confession bought her life, as seemed to be the case with many of the confessing witches in the Salem trials, and/or if her young age was a contributing or decisive factor. In many ways, there was nothing unusual about Dorcas/Dorothy apart from her status as the youngest accused and accusing child in this particular set of trials. She was not even its youngest victim: her own baby sister died in prison soon after her birth. Yet, considering how many other children were caught up in the tide of accusation and recrimination, her case has occasioned far more attention from historians and other writers and, as such, Dorcas/Dorothy has come to represent the injured innocence of the wrongly accused child; the child's status as victim under the influence of the aberrant witch mother; and the poor child as the site of both pity and hatred as will be discussed further below.

#### 'THE APPERISHTION OF DOROTHY GOOD'

Records of how Dorcas/Dorothy came to be accused of witchcraft are twofold: the court reports, based on her examination on March 24, 1692, and the contemporaneous narrative of Deodat Lawson. The court records show the claims of her four afflicted accusers that she tormented them, but there is no direct record of any response from Dorcas/Dorothy. In this case, as for many of the accusing children and adults, her voice is mediated through the questions asked by the judges and the conditions under which they were asked—the framing of the trials and the assumption of her guilt—that would have guided her answers; the recording of what was said, much of it second-hand from Lawson, who was not even present at the first examination and who only recorded or reported both questions and answers as reported speech and under the narrative frame of his book; the editorial framing in which the recorded words may have been unclear or edited for modern spellings (although this also presupposes a correctness of spelling that can be gauged from spoken speech); the various interpretations of historians/novelists/poets of what was said; and the interpretations of these accounts by the end-reader. Yet even without all of these layers of mediation, any claim to an authentic voice must be troubled: as early modern and modern-day courts have discovered all too

often, any claim to truth is subject to perspective and all manner of outside influences; the rash of confessions at Salem alone speaks to this issue.

On March 24, 1692, Ann Putnam Jr. testified against Dorcas/Dorothy thus, the language of her testimonial repeated across the accusations of the other three girls, and written by Thomas Putnam:

The Deposition of Ann putnam who testifieth and saith that on the 3th March 1691/92 I saw the Apperishtion of Dorythy good Sarah good's daughter who did immediatly almost choak me and tortured me most grievously: and so she hath severall times sence tortured me by biting and pinching and almost choaking me tempting me also to writ in hir book and also on the day of hir examination being the 24 March 1691/92 the Apperishtion of Dorithy good ly totor me dureing the time of hir Examination and severall times sence.<sup>12</sup>

As was the case in Dorothy's accusation against her own mother, access to Ann Jr.'s voice is mediated through her father, who was the writer of the deposition, despite the first-person narrative. Ann's deposition claims that she saw the apparition of 'Dorythy' or 'Dorithy', which went on to torture her, and did so on several further occasions including during Dorothy's own examination. This narrative creates a tension between 'saw' and 'Apperishtion'; between the physical and spirit worlds; and in the claimed interaction between the two girls. Ann Jr.'s claim to an apparition appears to be one of malicious intent from Dorothy, in that this is a testimony to an accusation of witchcraft; yet Dorothy did not appear directly *to* Ann, rather it is Ann that 'saw the Apperishtion', an ability to see spirits that seems to have excited little comment or reaction in the records or beyond, a further example of how the seeing of both children and adults was assumed to constitute a truth that did not need to be questioned. Ann's claim is also that she saw the apparition of 'Dorythy good Sarah good's daughter'; Dorothy is constructed in terms of her relationship with her mother, a relationship that can apparently be seen, even in the form of an apparition. Under this claim, to be seen as Sarah Good's daughter was accusation in and of itself. Further, in Ann Jr.'s deposition, despite the claim to Dorothy's apparition—something that belonged to Dorothy, came from Dorothy, but was not Dorothy herself—it was Dorothy who choked and tortured, bit and pinched, producing physical harm by allegedly spiritual means. However, the claimed harm was not just physical as Dorothy was 'tempting me also to writ in hir book'. The book—so often

invoked by the accusing girls as proof of malefic interaction—was not the Devil’s book here but Dorothy’s book; as can frequently be seen in the examinations of adults and children, the claimed ownership of a book and the temptation to write therein, especially in the temptation of and by the Eve-like female, was solid proof of the Devil’s work. And it was proof enough: on the evidence of Ann Jr., with similar claims from Mary Walcott and Mercy Lewis, Dorothy was remanded into the custody of the town constable.

Deodat Lawson, the minister of Salem Village from 1684 until 1688, returned to the village in March 1692 to investigate the witchcraft accusations that were beginning to consume the community. His pamphlet, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft, at Salem Village*, is one of the few contemporary narratives available outside of courtroom transcripts, and he took an interest in Dorcas/Dorothy’s case; much of what we know of ‘the child’ comes from this work. He narrates the story thus:

The Magistrates and Ministers also did informe me, that they apprehended a child of Sarah G. and Examined it, being between 4 and 5 years of Age, And as to matter of Fact, they did Unanimously affirm, that when this Child did but cast its eye upon the afflicted persons, they were tormented, and they held her Head, and yet so many as her eye could fix upon were afflicted. Which they did several times make careful observation of: the afflicted complained, they had often been Bitten by this child, and produced the marks of a small set of teeth, accordingly, this was also committed to Salem Prison; and the child looked hail, and well as other Children. I saw it at Lieut. Ingersols.<sup>13</sup>

At this point, Lawson is not recounting his own interaction with the child, but that of several others, the ‘Magistrates and Ministers’, who despite their plurality appear to have spoken with a single voice and experienced a singular encounter: ‘they did Unanimously affirm’. However, their experience is not of Dorothy or even Dorcas, but of an unnamed and sometimes ungendered ‘child of Sarah G’. Dorcas/Dorothy is divested of gender, referred to throughout by Lawson as ‘it’ and ‘the child’; she is only gendered as female in the claims to ‘her Head’ and ‘her eye’. And it is more important for this narrative that the accused child is associated with Sarah Good than with any claim to independent diabolic activity, thereby securing her as object rather than as an independent entity in the denial of her

name and, periodically, of her gender. When gender is acknowledged, it is linked to the body, to head and eyes, one of which can be restrained by adult men but the other which cannot and is therefore free to afflict all those it falls upon. The teeth, however, in their physical harm to others remain ungendered and ungendering: despite the evidence against Dorcas/Dorothy of 'the marks of a small set of teeth', it is 'this' and not 'she' that is committed to Salem prison to await transference to Boston jail, held without trial and without redress.

But here, at least, in the most repeated description of Dorcas/Dorothy by historians and novelists, 'the child looked hail, and well as other Children' when Lawson finally sees her for himself at Ingersoll's Ordinary. Despite claims to the affliction of others via her apparition, Dorcas/Dorothy is—at this point at least—'as' other children, in terms of what can be seen by Lawson: 'the child looked ... I saw it'. Yet this claim to wellness is curious: why make any comment on her health at all if only to claim that she is 'as other children'? And such a claim to health is only predicated on what can be seen and how Dorcas/Dorothy 'looked' to Lawson. Despite prior claims to an assumption of truth in what can be seen in these records, Lawson appears to be answering a query or even an accusation that the state of the child's health even at this stage was not what it ought to be; his comment appears to be a defence. Further, in Lawson's repeated positioning of Dorcas/Dorothy as 'child', she is always figured in opposition to adults, but it is a positioning that does not hold as her words are considered as important and truthful as those of any adult. Where, then, does her childness or her wellness lie, except in the seemingly exceptional 'look' of Lawson?

This record of Dorcas/Dorothy's examination is limited. The afflicted girls were clearly present and accusing her of biting them at the initial examination; but neither the judges' questions, her words nor the accusations of the afflicted girls during the examination are presented by Lawson. While this third-hand reporting may not be uncommon in trial records, the contrast between the recording and reporting of this examination with—as just one example of the examination of a child—Abigail Hobbs is marked: where detailed records are kept of questions and answers in Hobbs' initial examination (although this does not constitute the record of authentic or unmediated voice of Hobbs either), such is not available in any sense for Dorcas/Dorothy. Of course, it may well be that documents have been lost; but, equally, it may not, and Lawson's seeming defensiveness may prove, if not an answer, at least a question as to why.



Lawson continues his narrative of Dorcas/Dorothy's story through the reportage of others:

On the 26th of March, Mr. Hathorne, Mr. Corwin, and Mr. Higison were at the Prison-Keepers House, to Examine the Child, and it told them there, it had a little Snake that used to Suck on the lowest Joynt of it[s] Fore-Finger; where they observed a deep Red Spot, about the Bigness of a Flea-bite, they asked who gave it that Snake? Whether the great Black man, it said no, its Mother gave it.<sup>14</sup>

'The child' is again unnamed and ungendered in this passage, and is reported here as giving a testimony to her own supernatural activities to the magistrates but apparently outside of the formal courtroom setting of most examinations and trials; therefore, there is no court report of the proceedings, with Lawson's second-hand account providing all we know. Dorcas/Dorothy's narrative is all in the third person and in reported speech. However, while again we have a sense of adults' leading—the magistrates are there 'to Examine'—there is a claim to the child's freely given confession: 'it told them'. The contents of this confession are well known: that she had a snake as a familiar, which she fed from a red spot 'about the Bigness of a Flea-bite'; this explanation, according to Lawson's account, the magistrates accepted without reservation, despite Lawson's apparently unironic comparison to a far more likely flea bite. The only question was: 'who gave it that Snake?' The child witch's familiar, then, must be given by another: she cannot come to it herself, or through personal encounter with the Devil. The Magistrates asked if it came from the 'Black Man' of Boston, the patriarchal figure claimed by Tituba to be behind the malefic outbreak; but no, she was reported to have said, 'its Mother gave it'. Yet the claim that the snake 'used to suck'—firmly in the past tense—goes unquestioned: no matter if the snake has gone or if it no longer draws on her blood to live, the assumption is that once a witch, always a witch. Dorcas/Dorothy is again therefore positioned as witch, as both accuser and accused, as guilty by her association with her imprisoned mother, and also among those to be responsible for her mother's death.

In more formal court records that that of Lawson, the 'Summary of Evidence v. Sarah Good' on June 29, 1692, is recorded thus:

Dorothy Goods Charge ag't. her mother Sarah Good. That she had three birds one black, one yellow & that these birds hurt the Children & afflicted persons. her own Confession].<sup>15</sup>

This testimony constructs the first and only record of Dorothy (named as such here) as accuser, and in particular as the accuser of her mother; it is not known that she accused anyone else, and neither does the existing record suggest that she was asked or directed to do so. As with the other court records of the Salem trials, the words derive from the transcription and/or summarisation of the court recorder, and as with all such records of oral proceedings, we cannot ever know if the text constitutes a complete and/or accurate reflection of what was said. The court entry also constitutes an opinion, if one couched in legalese: this is 'Dorothy Goods *charge*' [my emphasis], constructing this report of Dorothy's words in terms of an accusation, and one that bears legal weight. It is also 'ag't. her mother', against (abbreviated) corroborating this as accusation and legal testimony. A child of four or five is capable here of understanding the implications of her words and framing them as accusation. However, this claim to her words *as* accusation is troubled by the end of the court entry: it is also 'her own Confession'. '[H]er own' again appears to construct her words as unmediated, offered freely without questioning or leading, particularly in comparison to those trial accounts where both questions and answers are recorded, highlighted further by the claim to 'Confession', which constructs both an offering and an admission, somehow, of guilt. To confess is to admit to something that might, or should, be kept hidden; Dorothy is already implicated with this word in her mother's alleged witchcraft.

This accusation/confession is '[t]hat [Sarah] had three birds one black, one yellow & that these birds hurt the Children & afflicted persons'. The 'Charge', therefore, is twofold: the possession of these differently coloured birds and, separately, that the birds hurt the 'afflicted persons'. As such, the claim to accusation is troubled: Dorothy does not claim that her mother hurt the afflicted, only that she possessed birds and that the birds hurt the afflicted; there is no claim to either direction or to intent from Sarah Good. The only factor that renders this as accusation is the phrase 'Charge ag't'. Further, under this construction, 'the Children' are not 'afflicted persons', but both separate from them and linked to them. However, neither does the term 'Children' encompass Dorothy herself: in her confession, she has become the not-child, the other, affiliated only to the woman constructed here as 'her mother'. This division from a

potential status as child was to have further implications as the trials progressed. The final point to raise here is that Dorothy's status is open to question in terms of the guilt/innocence debate at the centre of the trials and that has persisted in later attempts to understand the happenings in Salem. She is an accuser, but not one of 'the Children' who were both accusers and victims in their claims to Sarah Good's witchcraft; yet she is also confessor, linked by kinship in the record of the Court to her accused mother. Yet her significance—in the sense of what she has come to signify and why she so often represents all the accused Salem children—is always as the necessarily innocent accused child.

### 'AN UNCOMMONLY SMALL WITCH'

As in many narratives of the afflicted girls, historians and other writers have frequently turned to their imaginations to embellish the scant details of Dorcas/Dorothy's life and this has had an impact on the wider perception of Salem's representative child witch. I will therefore look at some of these texts to consider how the narrative of Dorcas/Dorothy has developed since the transcripts of 1692.

Starkey's constructions of the afflicted girls, as discussed in Chap. 1, tend to a focus on their guilt from the outset, while Dorcas—as she is named by Starkey—is rather described from a narrative point of view that considers her as apart from the 'girls' who accused her; one that also considers her size and gender, but in different terms. Dorcas was 'an uncommonly small witch' and 'five-year-old daughter of the pipe-smoking Sarah'.<sup>16</sup> The smallness and age of Dorcas are central to many of the historical narratives that consider her. Yet such claims are always, of course, relative, with her smallness predicated on a comparison with the other accused children, although they are rarely mentioned; with the afflicted, although they are positioned as children as well; with the adult accused; with her mother; and with the judges who condemn her to prison. This claim to smallness gives her a certain notoriety but also attracts a pity that has repeatedly positioned her as the archetype of the innocent victim. However, both innocence and victimhood are troubled by the continual association with her mother, the 'pipe-smoking Sarah'. Sarah Good is not innocent: she smokes a pipe, and her protestations of innocence mean no more than her daughter's claims to guilt, with the die having already been cast. By flouting societal norms, in troubling the role of a Puritan women

in Salem society, and by having a voice, albeit one that she kept largely under her breath, Sarah sealed her own fate in narratives such as these.

In Starkey's narrative, the minimally reported facts of Dorcas' reported 34 weeks and four days in prison are described from a somewhat fiction-alised viewpoint, despite the embedded quote from Lawson:

Sarah's little daughter Dorcas [...] was no longer "hale and well looking." Her face was pinched and sullen, her hair matted and wild. No one looking at the little creature, now furtive and savage as any alley cat, could doubt that here was one of Satan's breed. Treat a child like a witch and you'll have one.<sup>17</sup>

While this viewpoint is not necessarily endorsed by Starkey—rather, this is about the gaze of those constructed as other to the child, of the 'no one' who might, or might not, be looking—it is interesting to note the similarities in language between this description of Dorcas and Starkey's earlier descriptions of the afflicted girls. Dorcas is 'wild', a 'little creature' and, in behaviour, like to 'an alley cat'. The animalistic descriptions of the accusers also therefore encompass the accused; yet there are differences. While they run in a 'pack', like dogs or foxes, Dorcas is still 'little' and 'furtive', trying not to be noticed; she is also the 'cat' to their dog- or wolf pack, hunted rather than the hunter that pinched and bit the afflicted girls in their courtroom depositions. Starkey also favours descriptive language, with the couplets echoing the form of Lawson's description: Dorcas' face is 'pinched and sullen'; her hair 'matted and wild'; and she is 'furtive and savage'. While each of these rhetorical couplets adds to the picture Starkey is trying to paint of Dorcas, they also provide a vision of what a child should be and what Dorcas, therefore, is not; although in this pathologised viewpoint of the child, Starkey is not claiming any other child as the ideal as we have seen in her portraits of the afflicted girls. Rather, none of Salem's children live up to Starkey's idealised vision of childhood. Starkey also repeats her claims to littleness here, but with Dorcas' relational littleness constructed against her mother and the 'no one' who might or might not be looking at the child. She then considers that very gaze she invoked in describing Dorcas in prison, and how it might have—or did, under this perspective—impact her: 'Treat a child like a witch and you'll have one'. Again, we have a narrative position that sits outside of childhood, that sees childhood as something other than itself, and that claims a power of influence, of creation or, even, of re-creation. In treating Dorcas as a witch, the

adults of Salem have recreated her *as* witch in this narrative. To be a witch is therefore both the punishment and the appearance that, apparently, denotes what Starkey's narrative figures as a descent into the animal.

Starkey comments further:

Now there were not only witches but wizards, young girls lived in dread of a spectral rape by the incubus and of giving birth to a demon child. That such had already taken place was demonstrated by the person of little Dorcas Good; obviously a child of human get could not become a witch at an age so tender; let those sentimentalists who said that Dorcas was too young to be in prison think of the facts of the case and hold their tongues.<sup>18</sup>

As with the earlier quote, this is not necessarily the author's opinion; rather, it is likely that she is voicing what she interprets as contemporary concerns about witchcraft and the existence of demons in and around Salem in the late seventeenth century and using Dorcas to signify and embody such concerns. Particularly in that a theory was 'demonstrated by' not Dorcas as such, but by 'the person of', simply by existing she has become something other than herself and signifies a 'spectral rape' that both prefigures and creates her. Yet the violence of the language is undeniable, with Starkey's analysis positioning her both as the result of rape and as the child of a demon. Again, however, Starkey makes some interesting points: for example, that the conflation of witchcraft with childhood was assumed to be problematic, even in Puritan Massachusetts. She also suggests that someone might have spoken up for Dorcas due to her age, but there is no record of this having happened: Lawson raises no objections in his commentary; none of the known objectors to the trials—Brattle, Calef, even the villagers who began to object in writing—raise her case; and her father—who accused his own wife—did not speak up on his daughter's behalf. The best that can be said of William Good is that he did not condemn Dorcas as he did Sarah. Tragically, it seems that there is no evidence that anyone spoke up for Dorcas; except, maybe, for Starkey herself.

Another narrative to imagine the impact of prison on the again-named Dorcas is Frances Hill's *A Delusion of Satan*; yet this child is not the same child as seen under the God-like gaze of Starkey's Salem Villagers, but a child deserving of pity; a victim. Hill writes:

Dorcas was to spend many months without seeing the light of the sun, unable to run or walk and with nothing to play with but the rags she was

wearing. The little fingers that picked at or twisted and folded the torn, filthy cloth were the only part of her being she could move without hindrance or pain. At first she may have shouted or wept. Perhaps she banged her head on the wall she was chained to. But, like all small children without care, stimulation, or love, in the end she went silent, rocking to and fro, as far as her chains would allow, or lying still, staring blankly.<sup>19</sup>

While Hill qualifies parts of her narrative with the conditionals of 'may' and 'perhaps', these still result in a claim to knowledge: 'in the end she went silent'. Hill invokes her readers' sympathy in a number of ways: she repositions Dorcas' clothes as playthings, poor in their original usage but even more so when repurposed in such a way; she imagines the child's pain, her weeping, and a motion—banging her head on the wall, rocking to and fro—that is a world away from Starkey's savage alley cat. She is also placed in a wider context: Dorcas is 'like all small children without care, stimulation, or love'. Like Starkey, sympathy for Dorcas is created in the repeated and relative invocations of 'little' and 'small'; but while Starkey positions her as alone in her wildness, even as she is pursued by the 'pack' of accusing girls, Hill invokes a world of suffering children to share Dorcas' pain.

Hill also focuses on the relation between Dorcas and her mother in this consideration of the adult-child dynamic in Salem Village: after all, if there is blame to be apportioned, Sarah never seems to be far away. However, she also considers the accusation of the child Dorcas in different terms to those already discussed. She writes:

Dorcas, as the child of a witch, was automatically under suspicion herself, despite her young age. She must have accompanied her mother on begging expeditions; she may have copied her irascible words and behavior. She was very likely transformed in the girls' minds to a little creature of pure malevolence.<sup>20</sup>

In claiming that Dorcas was under suspicion 'despite her young age', Hill creates an expectation that her youth would protect her which she immediately undermines, figuring either Dorcas or those who suspected her as an anomaly. Hill also continues to claim a knowledge of the adult thought process that is denied, or at best partial, in terms of the afflicted girls and Dorcas herself. She 'was' under suspicion due to her mother's status as accused and condemned witch; yet Dorcas' life and experiences are subject

to the conditionals of ‘must’, ‘may’, and ‘very likely’. Within the constraints of these conditions, Dorcas is constructed as subject to her mother’s social and economic hardships, but also as absorbing or consciously copying some of the qualities that resulted in those hardships; a classic case of victim blaming for both Dorcas and Sarah. From these small troublings of Dorcas’ status, Hill surmises that, in the minds of the afflicted girls, she was probably ‘transformed’: there is no claim to intent here as the transformation is passive, outside of both Dorcas and the girls, but there is also no explanation of what she was transformed *from*. Rather, it is the language that condemns her as ‘a little creature of pure malevolence’, again ranked as animal, less than human, but hunter rather than hunted here, driven by her evil spirit that, despite its transformation from something other and one that exists in the girls’ minds only, is ‘pure’. However, there is still a play for the readers’ sympathy in ‘little’ and in the allocation of this metaphor to the assumed views of the afflicted. So, if Dorcas is not to blame, and the afflicted girls are passive in the transformation process, who is to blame? Yet again, it is Sarah Good, with Dorcas guilty by family association.

Benjamin C. Ray also considers the place of Dorothy (as characterised here) in the trials. He notes:

The next to confess after Tituba was Sarah Good’s five-year-old daughter, Dorothy. When Dorothy entered the courtroom, the record says that she cast her eye upon her accusers, Mary Walcott and Ann Putnam, and they became tormented. Dorothy also showed the magistrates marks of a “small set of teeth” on her arm. A day or so later, the magistrates interrogated Dorothy in prison for the purpose of obtaining a confession. [...] Dorothy’s was hardly a significant confession. But her examination reveals the magistrates’ fanaticism in their intimidation of a young child to obtain a confession.<sup>21</sup>

There appears to be an error here in that ‘Dorothy’ rather than the afflicted girls showed the teeth marks on her arm; but if so, this is a telling slip, one that appears to be predicated on a claim to Dorothy’s innocence in comparison to Mary Walcott and Ann Putnam Jr.. This might also be seen in the connective of the first sentence: Dorothy ‘cast her eye upon her accusers’, Ray claims the record shows, ‘*and* they became tormented’ [my emphasis]; there is no claim to causation. However, Ray claims further: ‘Dorothy’s was hardly a significant confession’. This may well be the case in that there was plenty of adult testimony against Sarah Good; Dorothy’s accusation was

not necessary to convict her mother. And yet, her confession resulted in her own lengthy imprisonment and eventual insanity; as such, the impact of the confession on her own life was immensely significant. Here, and as usual, significance is in the eye of the beholder. But even in Ray's own terms, Dorothy's confession was significant in that it exposed the 'magistrates' fanaticism'; her role being to expose others, despite being considered insignificant by default herself.

### CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Histories of the trials that claim a focus on their legal status are no less susceptible than others to remaking the Salem witch child through a sentimental and Romantic reading of Dorcas/Dorothy, one designed to appeal to the reader's sympathies rather than to analyse the legal status of her examination and imprisonment. Again, the child signifies childhood innocence, securing its status in as such and through its very loss. Peter Charles Hoffer's *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* is a case in point. Revisiting Lawson's account of her examination, Hoffer claims:

Little Dorcas was jailed in Salem, where on March 26, Hathorne, Corwin, and John Higginson arrived to interrogate the tiny witch. Together, they heard her confession. Tearfully, she held out a forefinger and told them where her "familiar", a little snake, used to suck [...] Kept in jail for the next eight months, Dorcas would watch her suckling infant sister die and her mother led away to the gallows, cry her heart out, and go insane.<sup>22</sup>

Again, the trope of littleness is repeated to elicit sympathy for '[l]ittle Dorcas', the 'tiny witch' with her 'little snake'; even her associations with witchcraft and the animal—and all the legal implications of such a confession—are reduced to a play for the reader's sympathy, much though it might be deserved. Further, Hoffer elaborates on Lawson's narrative to imagine the sentimental scene: she held out her forefinger '[t]earfully' and, kept in jail, she would 'cry her heart out': mirrored in the fictionalisation of Dorcas' tears is the expectation of the reader's own.

Brewer further considers the implications of the legal process against both Dorcas/Dorothy and Mary Lacey Jr. She claims:

Looking only at these two cases and at the few laws that exempted the very young, one could argue that, in Massachusetts, youth were prosecuted more



lightly than adults in the seventeenth century. Others tried in the same court rooms as Dorcas Good during the Salem witch trials of 1692 suffered death, but Dorcas escaped with only chains and imprisonment.<sup>23</sup>

In her claim that ‘youth were prosecuted more lightly than adults in the seventeenth century’, Brewer is taking the cases of these two girls as evidence for a wider claim, both geographically and across time: rather than viewing the Salem trials as an anomaly, as many historians still do, Brewer claims that Dorcas and Mary Lacey Jr. might be viewed as emblematic of a larger approach to the legal status of children, one that stretched back across the seventeenth century, but not necessarily forward just eight years into the eighteenth century. This is problematic in many ways, not least because historical records of these two ‘youth’ cases are in no way substantial enough, either in themselves or statistically, to make such a claim. Further, in her claim that the girls were ‘prosecuted’ and ‘tried’, Brewer fails to take into account the historical record that shows Dorcas’ examination and detention but no formal trial or prosecution. Brewer explains her hypothesis further by stating that ‘Dorcas escaped with only chains and imprisonment’ in comparison to the adults who were hanged. One point that Brewer fails to note is that Dorcas confessed, and no accused witches—children or adults—who confessed and did not later recant were hanged; although, as will be discussed in Chap. 6, the conviction of Abigail Hobbs and her resultant death sentence, even though it was not carried out, trouble such claims. Further, Dorcas’ case was never ‘tried’, as explained above, in comparison with those adults referenced by Brewer. And finally, the claim to ‘escape’ and ‘only’ when referencing a four or five-year-old child kept chained in a jail for eight months, during which—as Hoffer points out—her mother was hanged, her baby sister died, and she herself became insane, is distasteful at best. Yet even my own indignant and somewhat self-righteous response to Brewer’s analysis does show the power of narrative, particularly one of childhood innocence abused. For even within historical and critical debates about the legal system, emotion creeps in: as Rose suggests, we find ourselves ‘drifting into the counterflow’ of the lives of those we write about; ‘counter’, here, in that reading what might be constructed as a lack of emotion compared to earlier narratives suddenly seems anomalous, even wrong. After all, I am not suggesting for a moment that we should not feel sympathy for Dorcas/Dorothy; rather, I am suggesting that a line might be drawn between the fictionalisation of an already

horrifying event and the seemingly callous approach that reduces a child's tragic experiences to an 'escape'.

### 'THE WORDS OF DORCAS GOOD'<sup>24</sup>

This concern with the emotion of Dorcas/Dorothy's story resurfaces when considering her place in fiction based on the trials. Compared to many other, better-known participants such as John Proctor, Giles Corey, and her own mother, she plays little part in the fiction based on the Salem panic. She plays a small role in Ann Rinaldi's *A Break with Charity*, where she is presented as a pitiable figure. Narrator Susannah English says: 'I noticed how little Dorcas was shivering in the flimsy cloak that would not suffice once winter came in full force' and advises her mother: 'Get little Dorcas to a warm fire before she catches her death'.<sup>25</sup> She also appears briefly in Clapp's *Witches' Children* as 'little Dorcas' who 'clutched at her mother's skirt with a dirty reddened hand, and stared at me with dark solemn eyes'.<sup>26</sup> As with Hoffer's account, the repeated 'littleness' of Dorcas—particularly coupled with inadequate clothing and bitter weather—is invoked to elicit sympathy for the already-victimised child and to position her as emblematic of abused childhood innocence.

One text that takes a completely different approach, however, is Rose Earhart's 2000 text, *Dorcas Good: The Diary of a Salem Witch*, which focuses primarily on Dorcas' story; at least, in a sense. The blurb on the inner cover claims that the novel 'finally tells the real story of the savagery and terror of the Salem Witch Trials'. It is a strange claim to make about a clearly fictional text—if one based on historical events—and it is an even stranger text to read, taking the tragedy of Dorcas' life and turning it into something almost unbearable: in Earhart's novel, before the accusations of witchcraft even begin, four-year-old Dorcas is repeatedly raped by her father, and offered to the village as a child prostitute. However, I am considering it here as it is the most sustained engagement with Dorcas' story in a fictional or a historical text, and because of its claim to be telling the story in Dorcas' own voice.

The text takes the form of a diary, seemingly written by Dorcas herself, or at least by her fictional/fictionalised counterpart—the first entry begins, 'My name is Dorcas Good'—until an italicised note precedes the Eighth Entry:

*Note from Mistress Black: By now I feel it must be clear to any who have happened on this diary, that the writing is not that of a child who is but four and a half years old. While our Dorcas has always been quite precocious for her age, with intelligence beyond measure, she is still but a child, with a child's speech upon her lips.*

*Goodwife Philips read this first bit and has sternly chided me for not telling the reader that I have often translated the words of Dorcas into an order that can be understood. 'Tis true, I have. It is my belief that the words of Dorcas Good must be spoken in the clearest way possible so that her message will ring true and not be lost in the vagaries of a child's wandering speech. I assure you, however, that all that is written has been said or implied by our dearest Dorcas and is either her very words or the essence of them. This I swear upon the holy book.<sup>27</sup>*

This entry, a '[n]ote from Mistress Black', therefore casts doubt on the status of the preceding text. Despite the first-person narrator apparently telling her own story thus far, Mistress Black's intervention troubles the status of Dorcas' voice. It is 'translated' to ensure understanding by a presumably adult readership, as Dorcas is 'still but a child, with a child's speech on her lips'. It is therefore no longer positioned as the writing of 'a child but four and a half years old' with her years constituted here as a lack in 'only', despite 'the words of Dorcas' that are repeatedly claimed as origin and even as 'her very words'. Instead, this passage constructs the child's voice as in need of mediation, and the child as other to Mistress Black, Goodwife Philips, and to the textually invoked 'reader'. Dorcas is 'but a child'—childhood, as age, also invoked in terms of a lack—with 'the vagaries of a child's wandering speech'; she is inferior and subject to both judgement and ownership of adults as 'our Dorcas' and 'our dearest Dorcas'. While Dorcas is positioned within the reductive status of 'child' constructed by the narration, with its assumptions of a known and singular view of childhood, the adults are not all the same: there is a split between the adult characters who can 'translate', and who can judge and/or know 'the essence' of what Dorcas 'implied', and the adult readers who need such translation to fully understand. Despite both troubling and mediating what is claimed as the child's voice here, Mistress Black positions this diary as 'her [Dorcas'] message', one that 'will ring true'. Yet these claims are still subject to adult intervention, to 'my belief' of their importance and to a judgement of truth that destabilises its own claims: the truth is positioned here in the future tense and in the judgements of adults, rather than in Dorcas' words. Not only Dorcas' voice but her intent, her

meaning, and even the reading of 'any who have happened on this diary' must be directed by Mistress Black. As such, Dorcas is created within a relationship to adults that she cannot escape; much as we will see further in contemporary and historical records of Abigail Hobbs, and other accused children in relation to their families and the judicial system of Salem.

Despite its differences from other fiction portraying the events of Salem, *Dorcas Good: The Diary of a Salem Witch* does have certain factors in common with teenage witch fiction: the principle of these texts is that, as in Earhart's narrative and despite the preface's claim to 'the real story', the child is positioned as a witch. Sarah Good says to her daughter: 'What have you seen, Dorcas? Don't deny you can see that which is hidden to others. I know you see as my father did'.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly here, the witchcraft trait or gene is latent in the mother, although passed down in her line from Dorcas' grandfather. However, again it is the female adult who constructs what Dorcas is: 'I know you see'. In this text, then, witchcraft is real; Dorcas is a witch; and her 'seeing' is seemingly hereditary, a trait passed along the family line rather than taught or genetically passed directly from mother to child, as was the case in many of Salem's witchcraft accusations and in the court-recorded Dorcas/Dorothy's claims about her mother. At this point in the text, witchcraft is passive rather than active; seeing, rather than *maleficium*; a talent which may not harm others yet cannot save the fictionalised Dorcas in this strange and disturbing novel.

Nicole Cooley also considers Dorcas' place in the trials in her poetry collection, *The Afflicted Girls*, which contains two poems narrated by Dorcas: 'Testimony: The Mother' and 'Testimony: Talk Through Her Body', both of which are subtitled 'Dorcas Good'.<sup>29</sup> As in Earhart's text, Cooley claims to speak with Dorcas' voice via a first-person narrator; but she does not make any claims to a reality either of the named child or of an authenticity to her voice as Earhart does. The first poem, 'Testimony: The Mother', tells a story of Dorcas' examination that is imagined as a pseudo-medical, pseudo-religious, and sexualised naked sacrifice: 'I wait on the communion table / I unbutton my muslin dress while the Reverend reads' and 'I am four years old. My dress drops from my body', thus apparently edging towards similar territory as Earhart.<sup>30</sup> Yet much of this narrative is concerned with voice—with self-examination—as much as with the examination of others or with the sacrificial body of the child. Cooley's Dorcas meditates on the circle of accusing girls, choking

themselves with their own hands around their throats; the contrast between the teeth marks on each girl's wrist and her own mouth at her mother's nipple; and, finally, the saying of the unsayable: '*The girl is a witch*', at which the afflicted girls' let go of their throats, their ability to speak replaced by Dorcas' own inability: 'Does my mother sleep in jail alone? I want to call to her. / I can't. My body stands straight and still on the examining table, / my voice torn out—'. In setting her identity, the unnamed speaker who declares 'the girl' to be a witch also puts his voice in place of hers, and enables the voices of the afflicted girls, although at no point in this poem do they speak. Yet in the tearing of her voice from Dorcas' body there is a dichotomy in that she must speak of the very tearing that would deny her speech; even the extended dash at the end of the poem does not resolve this.

Voice is Cooley's preoccupation, not just in this poem, but in the wider collection and in other related writings too: after all, these poems do not stand alone but are accompanied by other forms of text, including notes to each poem, a chronology of events, and an American Antiquarian Society essay, 'Archival, Testimony: Poetry and the Salem Witch Trials', in which Cooley discusses the role of the poet and of poetry in terms of archive; the collection as a whole; and in particular those poems that focus on Dorcas and on Cooley's understanding of the historical events in which the child was involved. Regarding the latter, she writes:

So, know this: it's the voices that are most important. Call back Dorcas Good, the four-year-old girl who accused her mother, Sarah Good, of witchcraft, and then because her mother was accused, was considered suspect and sent to jail. [...] Write her testimony. Give her speech; grant her a body. Make us remember.<sup>31</sup>

This passage intrigues due to its imperatives, its tone of command: 'Know this [...] Call [...] Write [...] Give [...] grant [...] Make'. Cooley is addressing her reader but also, it appears, the writer without whom we would know so little of the trials or of Dorcas. Yet Cooley's Dorcas is also her own creation. Despite the claim to a recall of Dorcas Good, thereby assuming a real, authentic, and knowable child that is available to be unproblematically recalled, the power to remake her is solely that of the writer: we may call her back, but the 'voices' that Cooley claims as 'so important' are all authorial. In order to 'make us remember', the writer must, of course, write, but she must also 'Give her speech; grant her a

body'. As such, the claim that Dorcas (or any other historical figure) can be recalled is problematised: voice and body do not belong to her but to the writer that creates her anew.

This can be seen further both in Cooley's choice of which Salem figures to give voice to in her poems and also in the accompanying chronology. For all that she claims that: 'In most histories of Salem, Dorcas Good is a footnote', thereby giving Dorcas a much higher profile in her own collection than in the accounts and histories of other writers, she does so at the expense of all the other accused children.<sup>32</sup> Like many historians before her, she never gets beyond Dorcas: in her chronology—the only claim to a factual account in this book of poetry which, Cooley claims, 're-imagines the events in seventeenth-century Salem'—Dorcas is the only child accused.<sup>33</sup> Of course, I would not expect a full chronology in such a text, and any claim to a full chronology should and must be suspect in any case, but to 'give voice' to one accused child while ignoring the existence of all others risks silencing their stories still further. The question therefore returns of: why Dorcas? In Cooley's essay, she figures Dorcas as the peripheral or overlooked child, one whose voice has been occluded and therefore needs to be heard, thereby giving a higher status to the accused child than many historians; yet, in positioning her as representative, Cooley in fact achieves the opposite, flattening not only the stories of the other accused children into something that can be told by someone else but divesting Dorcas of any individuality as well.

### THE AFTERMATH

To return to the historical accounts of the trials, little more is heard of Dorcas/Dorothy in the records until the trials were over. Her mother, Sarah, was executed on July 19, 1692, along with Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, and Sarah Wilds. On December 21, 1692, nine months after her imprisonment, Dorcas/Dorothy was released on bail for the sum of £50 after Samuel Ray of Salem intervened on her behalf. However, the terms of the document appear to leave her in a legally liminal space: she was not pardoned, but 'let bail' on certain conditions:

That On ye Tenth day of December 1692 Samuel Ray of Salem. appeared before me Underwritten One of ye Councill for Thier Majtis Province of ye Massachusetts Bay in New England and acknowledged himselfe Indebted unto Our Soueraign Lord & Lady ye King & Queen ye Sume of fifty pounds

Currant Money of New: England on ye Condiçion hereafter Named—Vid't: That [ ] Good Daughter of [ ] Good of Salem Labourer being Imprisoned on Suspicion of her being Guilty of ye Crime of Witchcraft & being Now Let to Bail. That if The Said [ ] Good Shall & do appear at ye Next assize & Gener'll Goal Deliury to be holden at Salem {& abide ye Courts Judgment} Then ye aboue Recognisance to be void Elce to remain in force & vertue.<sup>34</sup>

The here-unnamed child is again constructed in terms of her familial relationships, but with her mother executed she is now the daughter of her father, despite his lack of intervention on her behalf and the absence of his name. Her status as guilty also remains: 'on Suspicion of her being Guilty of the Crime of Witchcraft'. This document does not exonerate her, and her bail is subject to her appearance at the next assize and to her abiding by the court's judgement; otherwise, 'the above Recognisance to be void'. While Dorcas/Dorothy was not executed, as was the case with other confessed witches of Salem, neither was she innocent.

Dorcas/Dorothy leaves the records some years later. On September 13, 1710, her father William applied for restitution for his family's sufferings during the trials. According to his account, he applied for funding on the following basis (no restitution was available to those who did not apply):

The humble representation of Will'm. Good of the Damage sustained by him in the year 1692. by reason of the sufferings of his family upon the account of supposed Witchcraft

1 My wife Sarah Good was in prison about four months & then Executed.

2 a sucking child dyed in prison before the Mothers Execution.

3 a child of 4 or 5 years old was in prison 7 or 8 months and being chain'd in the dungeon was so hardly used and terrifyed that she hath ever since been very chargeable haveing little or no reason to govern herself.— And I leave it unto the Honourable Court to Judge what damage I have sustained by such a destruction of my poor family—

Salem. Sept. 13. 1710

[And in another hand:] 30.£ proposed for to be allowed.<sup>35</sup>

Despite previous claims to the unnamed child as her father's daughter, the language of this document works somewhat differently. Sarah Good is '[m]y wife'; but the children are 'a sucking child' and 'a child of 4 or 5 years old'. Dorcas/Dorothy is not owned by her father here, or even named: she is 'a child' and is constructed in terms of uncertainty regarding both her age and the time she spent in prison. Yet the claims to her

treatment are on surer ground: she was chained, 'hardly used and terrified', and now at the age of approximately 23, she has 'little or no reason to govern herself'. The intent of this statement is clearly mercenary—'she hath ever since been very chargeable' and 'the damage I [William] have sustained'—although given the purpose of the statement, this is hardly surprising; however, despite the picture of the damage inflicted on the child during her time in prison and its long-term impact, the language is only reflective of its impact on her father. While he does not claim her (or her baby sister) specifically as his children, the money for their loss and their care is due to him. The final appearance of Dorcas/Dorothy in history comes some 18 months later, on January 21, 1712, with the 'Order of William Good for Payment, Cases of Sarah Good and Dorothy Good', with William Good asking for his payment to be made to Deacon Benjamin Putnam; Dorothy's name is not mentioned in the body of the document.<sup>36</sup> Her eventual fate is unknown.

### 'ALL CHILDREN, EXCEPT ONE, GROW UP'<sup>37</sup>

The investment in Dorcas/Dorothy Good's innocence, in many of the later narratives, and guilt in contemporary reports is always relative to the guilt and innocence of other children and adults involved in the affair. She is positioned as sign, securing the innocence not of witches but of children, even as the narratorial evisceration of the afflicted as 'evil children' does the same through seemingly opposing means. Yet the only difference is that in positioning Dorcas/Dorothy as little and as passive in her relations to all adults—parents, judges, even some of her accusers—the assaults on her innocence only cause that innocence to return and, as such, she stands in for all accused children, their innocence so secure that they do not need to be read at all.

Further, Dorcas/Dorothy cannot be finally and fully named as she is always 'the youngest' and the child that did not, could not, grow up: she is fixed as child both in the assumptions of her resultant mental age and in the 'popular imagination'. Even in her 'feral' state, she is an innocent child victim of adult vices and manipulation, albeit that she is the only accused or accusing child figured in terms of her poverty, one that is both hereditary (like the taint of witchcraft) and that still condemns her. As such, Dorcas/Dorothy is positioned as representative of childhood innocence in Salem, with that innocence assured by an adult narrative that requires her—and childhood more widely—to be innocent, troubled only by her



family relationships and her poverty from which she remains, still, guilty by association. Even in her signification as innocent and innocence, therefore, Dorcas/Dorothy as representative child remains the site of renegotiation from an adult point of judgement, but one that never allows it to escape that binary of innocent/guilty, and as that which has never been fully exonerated for its role.

## NOTES

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3. <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people/good.html> [accessed 20 March 2018].
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9. Rosenthal et al., pp. 711–712.
10. Rosenthal et al., p. 817.
11. Rosenthal et al., pp. 871, 897.
12. Rosenthal et al., p. 156.
13. Lawson in Burr, p. 159.
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15. Rosenthal, pp. 416–418, 417.
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19. Hill, p. 96.
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24. Rose Earhart (2000) *Dorcas Good: The Diary of a Salem Witch* (New York: Pendleton Books), p. 35.
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26. Clapp, pp. 23, 24.
27. Earhart, p. 35.
28. Earhart, p. 61.
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30. Cooley, 'Testimony: The Mother', pp. 20–21.
31. Cooley, (2003) 'Archival, Testimony: Poetry and the Salem Witch Trials', American Antiquarian Society, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44539516.pdf> [accessed 31 March 2020]. p. 269.
32. Cooley, 'Archival, Testimony', p. 270.
33. Cooley, 'Archival, Testimony', p. 269.
34. Rosenthal, pp. 711–712.
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## CHAPTER 4

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# Absence and Accusation: Reclaiming the Witch Child

### BEYOND DORCAS/DOROTHY GOOD

In addition to Dorcas/Dorothy Good, at least 22 children under the age of 18 were accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch panic, with the only evidence offered against them from ‘spectral’ sources. Each of these children ‘confessed’, although evidence suggests that torture was used in some cases. Yet despite the undoubted horror of their stories, the names of the accused children are not among those commonly associated with the trials or their aftermath. In this chapter, I therefore consider readings of the accused child as marginalised in order to examine the occlusion of their stories from so many histories of the trials. However, rather than simply offering a process of retrieval in which the stories of these ‘witch-children’ are told more fully, I also aim to consider the status of the accused children within the narratives of the trials to ask why they have received so little attention compared to the ‘afflicted girls’ and to consider how a reading of their relative omission from Salem’s story has wider implications on readings of children in historical narratives. I also intend to examine the difficulty of discussing these children in isolation from accused family members to consider how their stories are so often deemed less important or significant—in terms of how and what they signify about the wider trials—than those of Salem’s adults.

As has been discussed in Chap. 3, Dorothy/Dorcas Good has become the poster child for the much-wronged child witches of Salem in many

historical and fictional narratives. Yet, while she may have been the youngest child witch, one of the only accused children from Salem Village, and the first so accused, she was followed by accusations against more than 20 other under-18s and others still situated as children in some contemporary, historical, and fictional narratives. These children and young people lived across Massachusetts Bay, hailing from Topsfield, Andover, Billerica, and beyond, with Andover one of the two principal centres for witchcraft claims: 45 of Andover's residents were jailed for witchcraft, including three who were hanged and one who died in prison, and the total accusations exceeded those in Salem Town and Salem Village combined. Many children were accused after accusations against other members of their families, others prior to the accusations of their parents, and some were accused by their own parents. All of them confessed to their crimes and implicated others, frequently those already arrested but sometimes offering new names. And many had family members executed on their testimony, if frequently in tandem with the evidence of others. Yet despite the horror of this group history, few of the names of these accused children are known beyond the most detailed histories and a handful of YA novels, and none have had the impact on the 'popular imagination' of Salem's afflicted girls. Only Richard Hite's book, *In the Shadow of Salem*, discusses them at any length at all.

The association with their families may be one of the reasons for the occlusion of many of the accused children's stories in that they appear to act as what Rose terms 'the point of [...] constant slippage'.<sup>1</sup> For in attempting to write about the accused children as a group, they constantly slip into other narratives: the accusations against and hangings of parents such as Martha Carrier and John Proctor, and grandparents such as George Jacobs Sr.; their status as accusers as well as accused, frequently accusing their own parents and other family members; and the historical focus that so often passes over their own stories to reflect on how they may have impacted on those considered more significant to the event and the resultant story of it, as has already been seen in some narratives of Dorcas/Dorothy Good. As such, there has been relatively little interest in the children's confessions of their own witchcraft. The historical positioning of Dorcas/Dorothy as signifier for the accused children does work in this sense, but such a claim is undermined by the differences in each accused child's case. Yet both similarities *and* differences tell us something about the role of accused children: in the similarities, we can see children as

important in their testimonies about others; and in the differences, the problem of a group designation with a representative member returns.

In Europe and Africa, children have long been accepting as playing a significant and signifying role in the history of witchcraft as accused witches as well as innocent victims of witchcraft and accusers of adult witches. In Mora, Sweden, the 1669–1670 panic saw the identification of 70 witches, the majority of whom were children.<sup>2</sup> In Trier, in 1585, ‘scores of children’ confessed themselves to be witches. And in Würzburg, more than a quarter of the 160 witches executed between 1627 and 1629 were children.<sup>3</sup> Such figures show that the 10 per cent or so of accused witches that have been positioned as children in Salem’s accounts (given known figures) as probably less than the most extreme of European cases, but still as a statistically relevant group. In discussing these events, Sebald comments: “‘The innocence of the little ones’ is a phrase of dubious veracity since historical events suggest otherwise. Nowhere has this optimism stumbled over more obstinate obstacles than during the great witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”<sup>4</sup> He also comments: ‘Starting in the 1580s, the role of children turned active and assumed epidemic proportions. From that time until the mid-eighteenth century, the vast majority of the witch trials involved children, either as victims, victimizers, or both.’<sup>5</sup> Sebald therefore shows how the medicalised discourse of witchcraft extends beyond Salem in his claim to ‘epidemic proportions’. He also troubles an assumed innocence of childhood but immediately restates in as a desired characteristic through the ‘optimism’ of its ‘veracity’.

Yet, despite the ‘epidemic’ role of accused child witches in early modern European trials, the role of the accused children in Salem’s panic and in New England witch trials more widely has rarely been quantified or much commented upon. While one might only speculate upon the reasons, absence always being difficult to quantify, this is worth a little speculation. One reason might be other focal points from the trials in histories thus far, such as the female/male demographic split; a consideration of accused witches of an advanced age in assessing how far Massachusetts’ accused witches meet the ‘old crone stereotype’; and the impact of social class on witch accusations. Carol F. Karlsen considers such issues in her work on women and witchcraft in Colonial New England, in which she does consider the role of accused children; however, her focus is largely on female children and as a foil to her considerations of older women. For example, her table on the ages of accused (not convicted) female witches in Massachusetts 1620–1725 notes three accused female witches under

the age of 10 and 23 accused aged between 10 and 19 years old.<sup>6</sup> This data is of limited use to my investigation as only female witches are included and we do not know how many of these are related to the Salem trials; although in any case, Karlsen claims, 'a closer look at the evidence suggests that women under forty were, in fact, unlikely witches in Puritan society'.<sup>7</sup> Yet this data is still of value to this work in its assumed link to New England Puritanism, and also in that if women under 40 (a total of 49 in the 20–39 age group) were 'unlikely' witches, then female children were even less so, and male children less so again (although this is not Karlsen's concern in this text).

As can be seen from the tables in Chap. 1, the majority of accused children came from the small town of Andover and were accused in what has been figured as the second wave of the trials. As Hite discusses at some length, Andover's troubles began in earnest in July when the afflicted girls were called in by Joseph Ballard, a concerned husband, to diagnose whether his wife Elizabeth's illness was caused by witchcraft. Although the town had already fallen under suspicion with the earlier arrest of Martha Carrier, she was not a native resident and was unpopular in the town due to the assumption that she and her family had brought smallpox to the region on their arrival. It was the response of the afflicted girls to Ballard's request that took the trials in a new direction entirely, and the town's children bore much of the brunt of their accusations, with at least 18 children implicated and at least five new accusers (not counting those also accused unless they claimed affliction too). In this sense, Levack and other historians' claims to an 'epidemic' seem apt, as does the medicalised discourse so frequently employed.<sup>8</sup>

The accusations were familiar from Salem's earlier court cases: children ranging in age from eight to 18 were charged with covenanting with the devil; sending their shapes out to harm Salem's afflicted girls; and—in a newer trope—being baptised into the devil's service, a diabolic twist on the afflicted children's status as bound girls, and one that was primarily relevant to Andover's children. The accused also attended witch meetings, hurt other children, and used poppets to cause harm. As such, both the accusations against and the confessions of the children tallied with those of the adults before and after their examinations in many ways. We might therefore argue that the already problematic line between adulthood and childhood in Salem was further troubled by children's status as accused: the two groups were accused in the same way; they were questioned in the same way; and their status in court seemed no different from each other.

Despite their ages, it is therefore difficult to locate Andover's under-18s as children at all: in the eyes of the law, they were adults. And yet, as these cases will show, their status remained subtly different in that their importance lay primarily in their accusations against adults rather than in their own confessions to witchcraft.

Although it might be impossible to tell the stories of each of the accused children in this analysis, or to claim that the cases I intend to recount are any way representative of an entirely imaginary whole as each case had its differences from the others—or indeed claim that such an approach might be desirable—this chapter will analyse narratives of just a few of the accused children, before further considering the reasons for their marginalised status and looking at those historical and fictional accounts that do tell their stories in order to analyse how these constructions of childhood might impact a wider understanding of the role of Salem's children.<sup>9</sup>

### CHILDREN ON TRIAL

One fact of the trials of which I was unaware until undertaking a thorough reading of the court records—and one that I did not find discussed in any of the histories I have read, with the qualified exception of Hite, who mentions the indictments of four Andover 'minors', including 18-year-old Richard Carrier—was that, although it is widely noted that Abigail Hobbs was subject to a full trial despite her young age, she was not the only child to face trial in addition to the usual process of an examination followed by prison until released on bail, as was the case with most of the accused children of Essex County.<sup>10</sup> Abigail may have been the only child found guilty of witchcraft, as will be discussed in Chap. 6, but five others were also tried: Johanna (12) and Hannah Tyler (13), Mary Barker (13), William Barker Jr. (14), and Margaret Jacobs (16). While he did not come to trial, John Proctor's son, William (17), had three indictments returned *ignoramus*; 13-year-old Stephen Johnson was indicted for affliction and covenanting with the devil, but no record of any trial survives; and 18-year-old Richard Carrier was also indicted with no trial record found. Of the four younger children for whom some (if limited) trial documents exist, the Barker children confessed, but there is no record of the Tyler children having done so. Yet this statistic is little discussed or even referenced in histories of Salem.

Mary and William Barker Jr. were from Andover, the town with the highest level of child and adult witchcraft accusations but which entered

the story at a relatively late point in the proceedings. Despite the common surname, Mary and William were not brother and sister, but first cousins, although they later married each other in 1704: Mary was the daughter of John and Mary (Stephens) Barker; William Jr. was the son of William and Mary (Dix) Barker.<sup>11</sup> Mary was arrested on August 25 along with her uncle, William Barker Sr., for afflicting Abigail Martin, Rose Foster, and Martha Sprague.<sup>12</sup> She was examined on August 29, confessing that Goody Johnson made her a witch and that she had afflicted those she was accused of hurting ‘by squeezeing her hands’.<sup>13</sup> She also confessed to being at a witch meeting with her uncle and claimed that she had been threatened by Goody Johnson and Goody Faulkner. Mary also said that ‘she was Lost of god and all good people’.<sup>14</sup> She was indicted on January 13, 1693, for afflicting Rose Foster and Abigail Martin, and despite her release on the same day—along with her cousin, William—on recognisance to her father and John Osgood Sr., she came to trial at the very late juncture of May 10, 1693. Described as ‘Single woeman’ by the court reporter—Mary would likely have been 13 at this point—she pleaded not guilty to the two charges.<sup>15</sup> The jury, led by Captain John Putnam, accepted her plea and Mary was discharged.

While no arrest warrant survives for William, it is likely that his arrest came after that of his father and cousin as he was not examined until September 1. At his examination, William was accused of witchcraft against the same three complainants as Mary: Martha Sprague, Rose Foster, and Abigail Martin which, according to the record, ‘he did not deny but could not remember’.<sup>16</sup> As the examination progressed, however, William confessed to being ‘in the snare of the devil’ for just six days; to a baptism by the devil in Five Mile Pond; and to afflicting Martha Sprague but ‘Saith he is sorry & hates the devil’. Neither his confession, the short duration of his claimed pact with the devil, nor his repudiation and apology were sufficient to avoid a trial. We know that at least some of the afflicted were present for his examination as he ‘struck [them] down [...] with his eyes’ and that, after his confession, he ‘could then take the afflicted persones by the hand without doeing ym any harme’. On September 16, he gave evidence against Mary Parker for afflicting Martha Sprague with him.<sup>17</sup> The indictments made against him were for covenanting with the devil and for afflicting Martha Sprague, with both issued on January 13, the same day as those of his cousin. Like Mary, he was then released into the guardianship of his uncle and John Osgood Sr. and, like Mary, he was tried, pleaded not guilty, and found not guilty by a jury on May 10, 1693. On September



13, 1710, John Barker petitioned for the restitution of both children (now grown and married six years), from which we learn that William was imprisoned for six weeks, although similar detail is not available for Mary.<sup>18</sup>

The cases of the Barker cousins are of interest to this analysis of the accused children for many reasons. While the principal wave of the trials was largely over with the cancellation of the court of Oyer and Terminer in October, trials of both adults and children resumed in January under the Supreme Court of Judicature. In addition, while the majority of Andover children were released on bail into the care of their families and other adults (although this came later for the Barker children; winter was already fully at hand by January), this did not guarantee that they would not be indicted and/or recalled for trial: as was the case with Abigail Hobbs, the assumption that children were not hanged in Salem is therefore up for question. Children, as well as adults who were accused in the later phases of the trials, therefore showed that confession was no guarantee of a stay of execution; indeed, the later the accusation and despite the cancellation of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, the more likely were the judges to proceed to a full trial, confession or no confession. And finally, while the jury chose to accept the not guilty pleas of Mary and William Barker, there was still every chance of being found guilty at trial, no matter that the accused were children.

Oddly, perhaps, given their status as two of only six children to be tried for the crime of witchcraft in Salem, the case of the Barker children garners very little attention in histories or in fiction. Chadwick Hansen's *Witchcraft at Salem* discusses the testimony of William Barker Sr., but not that of his son and niece. Rosenthal's *Salem Story* mentions William in passing, but only as part of an argument that the 'afflicted girls' of Salem were sometimes boys. William is mentioned in terms of his accusations of others; his own fate is irrelevant, and Mary is not mentioned at all.<sup>19</sup> Hite's work on the accused of Andover does discuss the cousins, but only in terms of the many indictments of children on January 13, 1693 and their eventual marriage on which he comments: 'Marriages between first cousins did not occur that frequently in Massachusetts Bay colony, but they did happen. In this case, their shared experience in jail created a bond far stronger than the usual one between cousins. The witch hunt brought these two together'.<sup>20</sup> As such, they are anomalies, but with such aberrance explained away by the already aberrant nature of the trials. Mary also features in a contemporary letter written by Francis Dane—an Andover town minister whose family was decimated by the witchcraft accusations—in which he

defends those of his congregation who had been accused and which Hite quotes in full. Of Mary, Dane says: ‘Some Children, that we have cause to feare that dread has overcome them to accuse themselves in that they knew not. Stephen Johnson Mary Barker the daughter of Lieftenant Barker, and some others...’.<sup>21</sup> But Hite does not tell of either child having been tried for their supposed crimes.

The accused Tyler children also lived in Andover. Twelve-year-old Johanna and 13-year-old Hannah are often confused in histories of Salem due to similarities in their names and ages, but Rosenthal et al. record their stories separately, alongside that of their elder sister, 16-year-old Martha. Hite tells us that Hannah was tried and acquitted but that Martha and Johanna were never tried; in fact, according to the court records, only Martha was not tried, with both of her younger sisters facing trial; again, a possible reason for the occlusion of their stories.<sup>22</sup> The records for the Tyler children are scarce, lacking arrest warrants and evidence against them. Instead, the examinations of five children—Martha and Johanna, plus Dorothy and Abigail Faulkner Jr., and Sarah Wilson Jr.—are summarised in a single document against Abigail Faulkner, where their confessions were only to the guilt of Abigail Sr. in making them witches; in this document, at least, there is no interest in their own status as confessed witches.<sup>23</sup> However, an examination of Johanna immediately follows, in which she confesses that Goody Faulkner and the black man persuaded her to set her hand to a book, to afflict Sarah Wilson and Sarah Phelps, and to attend a witch meeting at Chandler’s pasture, in return for the promise of fine clothes; by this time, such confessions followed a well-worn formula.<sup>24</sup> Johanna figures in the recognisance for herself and her sister Martha of January 13, 1693, and Rosenthal et al. tell us that the two girls were cleared with many others on May 10. Despite their claim in the biography section that Johanna was tried and found not guilty, there are no extant records of indictments or trial.<sup>25</sup>

This is not the case for her sister, Hannah, however. Hannah’s name appears with five others—Mary Osgood, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson, Mary Tyler, and Abigail Barker—in an extraordinary document from January 3, 1693 in which the six explain how the witch trials moved to Andover and that their confessions resulted from being ‘consternated and affrighted even out of our reason’ and ‘our nearest and dearest relations, seeing us in that dreadful condition, and knowing our great danger, apprehended that there was no other way to save our lives’ except by ‘confessing ourselves to be such and such persons as the afflicted represented us to

be'.<sup>26</sup> The document concludes by telling how they each renounced their confessions, only to be told that some of them would be 'going after [Samuel] Wardwell', who had renounced his confession only to be hanged. Rosenthal et al. note that this document was likely presented in early January 1693 when 'these women' were facing trial, and it is notable that 13-year-old Hannah is included by Rosenthal in their designation of status as 'these women' and that her signature was held valid enough to appear on this claim. This petition is also important as it tells us that the high number of confessions among the Andover children and adults were due to a strategy: that of staying alive. Yet, of course, its success was only partial as four more children—and many adults—were tried before the trials finally ended. An indictment of Hannah for afflicting Rose Foster was recorded on January 5, and her trial followed in quick succession on the same day. The trial document tells us that she was also indicted for covenanting with the devil and had therefore 'becom a detestable Witch'; like the Barker children, she pleaded and was found not guilty.<sup>27</sup> Her name was not included on the January 13 recognisance for her two sisters, so we can assume with some confidence that she had been set free by this point. However, this does put Rosenthal et al.'s claim that Johanna was tried and found guilty in some doubt, unless her trial came after her release from prison on bail, as occurred in other cases.

While each of these cases of children on trial has its differences from every other, particularly, in terms of their position within the court documents and later historical narratives, the occlusion of their status as tried in most historical accounts of Salem can only be read as an absence, no matter the difficulties in doing so. Because while these children and the witchcraft claims against them were deemed important enough for them to face trial and the very real possibility of conviction and death by hanging, the relative absence of these stories from narratives of Salem skews such accounts to focus solely on adult witches, with child witches relegated to a supporting role. But given that such a high percentage of accused children—more than 25 per cent—were tried, their status as accused witches in their own right, rather than simply as the accusers of others, merits far more consideration, particularly when looking where to assign blame and when analysing data of the accused in Salem. After all, to be a child was no defence in Salem, and it was perhaps only by the late entry of Andover into the proceedings and the fact that most of the accused children were from this period that no child was hanged.

## A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE CARRIER CHILDREN

However, in focusing on the importance of the accused witch as child in the trials, this is not to claim that their role within their families was not also of paramount importance in the pattern of accusation: each of the children discussed so far, including Dorcas/Dorothy Good, was accused along with other family members. Another family hard hit by the witchcraft accusations in Andover was the Carriers; but even though four children were accused and only one adult in the same immediate family, with two of those children tortured into giving evidence, it is the mother who gains most attention in history. Andover's first accused witch, Martha Carrier, gained a certain notoriety as one of the victims of the trials: designated as 'This rampant Hag' and 'Queen of Hell' by Cotton Mather, her neighbours lined up to accuse and, ultimately, convict her, testifying to mysterious deaths of cattle, bodily complaints that only healed after her arrest, and an eloquent anger when crossed.<sup>28</sup> Her four children also testified against her. Carrier and her husband Thomas (who was never accused, along with their youngest child), were suspect from their arrival in Andover because they had apparently brought with them a smallpox epidemic that resulted in 13 deaths, including seven from their own extended family. Yet it was not until May 28 that Martha was arrested by John Ballard, the constable for the South End of Andover, and brought to magistrates for questioning. She was hanged on August 19, 1692. However, four of her five children remained imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft, while other family members were also both implicated in her guilt and became accusers against her and others: as Hite discusses in his history of the Andover witches, the majority of the Andover witchcraft cases were family affairs, despite the intervention of the afflicted girls.

Yet Carrier was not the first of her family to be so accused or even the first whose arrest also implicated their own children. Carrier's brother-in-law, Roger Toothaker, was arrested on May 18, after boasting of witch-hunting abilities through the use of countermagic that he claimed he had taught to his nine-year-old daughter, Margaret. Margaret and his wife Mary, sister of Martha Carrier, were arrested along with Carrier; although Roger and Margaret were never brought to trial—with Toothaker himself one of the victims of the trial due to his death in prison on June 16—Mary was tried and found not guilty. Among the scanty trial records of Margaret is the May 28 complaint against her and many others for afflicting Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, Ann Putnam Jr., and 'Others

belonging to Salem Village or farmes'.<sup>29</sup> As was the case with many others, suspicion of witchcraft first fell upon her due to accusations against her parents; but, unusually, she was directly implicated by her father, who according to one testimony claimed that he had 'said his Daughter had kild a witch' by using a spell herself: taking some urine from the accused person, bottling it, and leaving it in an oven overnight until the witch was dead; an accusation not just of countermagic, therefore, but of murder.<sup>30</sup> Mary Lacey Jr. placed Margaret at a witch meeting in her examination of July 21, and Andrew Foster and Elizabeth Johnson Jr. testified against her further, although in each case she was referred to only as the child of one or other of her parents: nobody seemed to know her name. While she exits the official records at this point, it is known that she was released from prison and assumed that she died during an Indian raid on the Toothaker home just three years later, on August 5, 1695.<sup>31</sup>

With so little information available from the records on Margaret, it is no surprise that she does not figure much in narratives of the trials; but there are a couple of exceptions. In Chadwick Hansen's explosive 1969 work, *Witchcraft in Salem*, in which he posits that witchcraft was real and that the accused were frequently guilty, he claims: 'if the testimony concerning Roger Toothaker and his daughter may be taken at face value—and there is reason to believe it may—we have one case of murder by witchcraft—one case in which occult means were used to take a human life away'.<sup>32</sup> Later, he adds in a discussion about those that had gone free after the fall of the Court of Oyer and Terminer: 'among the latter were some thoroughly unsavoury wretches, like Dr. Roger Toothaker and his daughter'.<sup>33</sup> While it is easy to dismiss such claims, especially given Hansen's error regarding Roger Toothaker who had died in prison before this point, the positioning of nine-year old Margaret—only ever constructed in relation to her named father, despite the claim to murder by witchcraft—as both a practicing witch and responsible for her actions in the claim to 'unsavoury wretches' still continues to be read and to influence other works. After all, many fictions (especially YA fictions) based on the trials make some assumption of witchcraft as real. In Kathleen Kent's novel, *The Heretic's Daughter*, for example, Sarah Carrier claims:

Being with Margaret was like standing inside the casing of a lantern, one that kept the warmth in and the stinging insects out. I refused to think it peculiar if at times, gazing up at the tops of trees, she nodded to the air and said, "Yes, I will." Or if, in carving out little hollow places in the snow, she

placed her ear close to the ground to listen to some music only she could hear.’<sup>34</sup>

While Kent may romanticise the child as witch in her work with a description of Margaret’s magic being in and of nature, compared to Hansen’s outright condemnation, both narratives naturalise the link between the child and witchcraft discussed in Chap. 1 of this work in that Margaret’s status as witch is never questioned, although Sarah is not implicated in her cousin’s witchcraft in this work, disturbing any claim to a congruity across narratives of Andover’s children. As such, while no record of Margaret’s examination survives and neither was she indicted nor tried, Margaret’s legacy remains one of witchcraft in such narratives.

The two eldest Carrier children, Richard and Andrew, were arrested together on July 21 for ‘Sundry acts of wichcraft [sic]’ against Mary Warren ‘&c’, thereby placing Mary as one of the afflicted girls invited to Andover.<sup>35</sup> Mary Lacey Jr. also spoke against Richard and his brother: during her examination, she testified that she saw ‘Young Carrier’ sit upon Warren’s stomach, and that ‘ffurther there is a little Boy at Deacon ffrys yt is an vnhappy Boy & I think he Joynes in this Witchcraft his Name Is Andrew Carrier & he hurts frys Child because fry beat him’.<sup>36</sup> This is an interesting testimony for many reasons. The Carriers were from Andover, previously from Billerica; yet the two Salem Village Marys knew them enough to name them. Further, Mary Lacey Jr. names Andrew as a ‘little Boy’, although he would have been 15 or 16 at this point. She also accuses him of beating a child because his father beat him: there is no question of indicting a man for harming a child based on this evidence, but a child is being accused of hurting another child by spectral means with such an accusation signalling a legally validated guilt. Finally, as with Dorcas/Dorothy, there is no sense at all of disbelief that a child might hurt or even kill another child, thus further disturbing the idea of the ‘obedient’ Puritan child in many histories.

While the Carrier boys appeared in numerous accusations, they are perhaps best known for the records of their own examinations—ratified later in a letter from John Proctor—that testify to their torture in order to gain the desired confession. On July 22, Richard, Andrew, and Mary Lacey Jr. and Sr. were examined. The record begins:

22th July 1692 Richard Carrier Aged 18 Years & His Brother Andrew @  
16 Years Richd Carrier & his brother brought into Court who vnto Many

Questions propounded returned Negatiue Answers to all & ye afflicted persons sd they Saw ye black Man & there Mother wth others Stand before ym on ye Table to Hinder there Confession.<sup>37</sup>

This record is interesting because Richard is named while Andrew is more frequently positioned as 'his brother'; because neither the questions nor the negative answers are detailed; and because it is assumed the two boys would have confessed if they were not stopped from doing so by supernatural means. Yet the judicial response to these assumptions was to torture the two boys rather than their mother or the alleged others who were apparently preventing them from speaking; and, of course, the torture achieved the results required by the judges, thus disturbing to its utmost any remaining assumption of a semblance of a fair trial in Salem. In the meantime, the judges questioned Mary Lacey who made further extensive allegations against the older Carrier brothers. When their examination recommences, the record states: 'The afflicted persons were Greuously tormented yt Rchd and Andrew were Carried out to another Chambber—And there feet & hands bound a Little while after Richd was brought In again. Q Richd though you have been Verry Obstinate Yett tel us....'<sup>38</sup> As such, this record contradicts that of earlier: far from the boys' denials of witchcraft being the fault of their mother and the 'black man', or because they were telling the truth, it is Richard's own obstinance that accounts for his previous silence at this point in the narrative. Under torture, however, Richard spoke, followed by his younger brother and, later, his little brother and sister, Thomas and Sarah.

The account of the Carrier boys' torture, along with that of his own son, William, is reiterated and explained further by John Proctor, petitioning the court for clemency for the accused from prison. Proctor's petition came the day after the Carrier boys' examination, on July 23. He begins by accusing their accusers, the judges, and the jury who, he says, 'nothing but our innocent blood will serve in their turn'.<sup>39</sup> He explains that all those in prison are innocent, despite accusations against them including from some of their own number: 'Two of the 5 are (Carriers Sons) Young-men, who would not confess any thing till they tyed them Neck and Heels till the Blood was ready to come out of their Noses, and 'tis credibly believed and reported this was the occasion of making them confess that they never did.' He adds:

My Son William Proctor, when he was examin'd, because he would not confes that he was Guilty, when he was Innocent, they tyed him Neck and Heels till the Blood gushed out at his Nose, and would have kept him so 24 Hours, if one more Merciful than the rest, had not taken pity on him, and caused him to be unbound.<sup>40</sup>

This appeal to the magistrates shows us that torture was used on at least two occasions during the trials on children (and on Richard Carrier, who had just turned 18); to the best of my knowledge, based on extant documentary evidence, overt physical torture was only used at one other point of the trials, though it is possible, of course, that relevant documents have been lost or that other instances of torture were never recorded. While this appeal did not save John Proctor's own life, at least his children and the Carrier boys were spared.

There is less extant documentary evidence available concerning the younger Carrier children than on their older brothers. Ten-year-old Thomas Jr. appears solely in the short record of his own examination on August 10, in which he confessed that he had been a witch for a week and that his mother, Martha, had taught him witchcraft and baptised him in the river; and in the following examination of Elizabeth Johnson Jr., who claimed that she and Thomas had afflicted Sarah Phelps, Mary Walcott, and Ann Putnam (probably Jr.).<sup>41</sup> Neither record lists the questions asked of Thomas, and his answers are summarised in the third person only. Seven-year-old Sarah's examination contains more detail and is set out in the question-and-answer format more commonly used in the records of earlier trials, although at points it slides into third-person narrative. And, as with earlier trials, both the construction of the report—termed 'Sarah Carrier's confession'—and its content show the assumption of guilt and the leading questions that characterised the trials of adults too, beginning: 'How long hast thou been a witch?'<sup>42</sup> Sarah made a full and frank confession to her status as a witch and her mother's role in making her so in response to such leading questions.

While not much may be known of the younger Carrier children from the court records, they and their elder siblings figure more prominently than some others in both history and fiction, possibly due to their infamous mother, Martha, or to the extent of the accusations within this single family. In Hite's comprehensive work on the Andover section of the trials, he considers the reasons behind Mary Lacey's attacks on the eldest sibling, Richard Carrier:



[O]ne almost wonders if Mary Lacey had a specific grudge against Richard Carrier. They were both eighteen years old—it would be all too easy to suggest that she felt an unrequited attraction for him. It is far more likely though that the earlier reasons cited for her confession were still at work: she may have genuinely believed in her own guilt, she may *have* in a sense been guilty (if she did actually use poppets with the intent of harming others), and she certainly thought Richard’s mother was not only a witch but also the designated “Queen in Hell”.<sup>43</sup>

While this focus on sexuality is uncommon in accounts of the Salem trials, later accounts and fictions explore this possibility as one explanation of the afflicted girls’ behaviour, as discussed in Chap. 1. Hite’s take is that ‘an unrequited attraction’ could have been behind Mary Lacey’s attacks on Richard Carrier, although even he finds this somewhat unlikely, which begs the question of why mention it at all. Hite’s speculation also calls attention to a further aspect of the afflicted-accused relationship that has not yet been explored in any depth: that all the accused children were accused primarily by other children. Of course, most adults were also accused primarily by children, at least in the early stages of the trial process; yet this child-on-child cycle of accusation and counter-accusation—given that Lacey, like many others, was also accused by other children herself—formed a major part of the trials.

Hite also considers the implications of the Carrier children’s accusations against their mother:

Martha Carrier died without knowing the fate of her children. Of the five that were living, four (ranging in age from eighteen-year-old Richard to seven-year-old Sarah) languished in jail, charged with being among their mother’s minions. Only three-year-old Hannah was spared suspicion, and even that is surprising given that four-year-old Dorothy, the daughter of the executed Sarah Good, had been charged. [...] The accused children had to live out their lives knowing they had helped seal their mother’s fate, though in the case of the two younger ones, their examination came after she had already been condemned to death.<sup>44</sup>

This account claims to be about the ‘fate’ of Martha Carrier’s children; yet their temporary imprisonment and the impact that this would have had on their childhood and later adulthood appears secondary to Hite’s disturbing claim to their role in their mother’s death, ‘knowing that they had helped seal their mother’s fate’. Even Cotton Mather, hardly Martha

Carrier's biggest fan, was moved to point out that she was not put to death on their testimony; yet Hite seems willing to sacrifice fact for drama, a move that does not doubt the children's innocence of witchcraft but is happy to make at least her eldest two sons complicit in their mother's death. Further, this account positions Dorothy, as she is named here, as an anomaly against the three-year-old Hannah and in her position as the youngest accused child, even if still through an assumption that she could, or should, be representative.

The Carrier children were discussed by Mather in his post-trials work, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, in which he claims:

Before the Tryal of this Prisoner [Martha Carrier], several of her own children had frankly and fully confessed, not only that they were Witches themselves, but that this their Mother had made them so. This Confession they made with great Shews of Repentance, and with much Demonstration of Truth. They related Place, Time, Occasion; they gave an account of Journeys, Meetings and Mischiefs by them performed, and were very credible in what they said. Nevertheless, this Evidence was not produced against the Prisoner at the Bar, inasmuch as there was other evidence to proceed upon.<sup>45</sup>

Mather happily spins the facts to suit his narrative in this account, ignoring the initial denials of guilt by Richard and Andrew and their subsequent torture as stated in the record of their examination in his claim that the children had 'frankly and fully confessed'; as such, he also ignores the dynamics of the trial in positioning such confessions as freely given, rather than in response to arrest and subsequent leading questions. Mather further elides any differences between the children, positioning the 'several [...] children' with a singular voice. This narrative appears to presuppose Mather's presence in the courtroom during the examination of these children in his claims to the credibility of their evidence and their 'great Shews of Repentance' and 'much Demonstration of Truth': both truth and repentance are able to be seen in this account, both by Mather and—one assumes, given the acceptance of these claims as opposed to the torture resulting from their denials—the judges. This ties in with the visual aspect of spectral evidence, and the assumption that what is seen is real and beyond any need for interpretation, despite the necessarily subjective nature of such reports. But, again, Mather's narrative shows of how little account most accused child witches were to anyone but themselves: it is

only in their evidence against their mother (even if it was not admitted in her trial and did not contribute to her death, despite the already-discussed gruesome speculations by those such as Hite that they were culpable) that their testimony matters, an approach that has been born out in too many later histories.

Another such account of the accused children's position in the trials is given by Mary Beth Norton. The Tyler sisters, the Barker children, and the Carriers are included in Norton's summary of the Andover children's involvement in the trials, offering a more sustained consideration of the accused children than in many histories; yet, it is a curious take and is worth quoting and analysing at some length. Norton claims:

A careful reading of the surviving records reveals the crucial significance of confessions by children and youths (below the age of twenty-five) both in confirming earlier identifications of witches and in creating new ones. When Richard, Andrew, Sarah, and Thomas Carrier Jr. all confessed and implicated their mother, that seemed to verify the testimony against her by other witnesses. The same was later true of William Barker Jr., and the children of Abigail Faulkner, Mary Bridges, and Mary Tyler. Furthermore [...] young people seemed especially likely to identify [...] others for the first time. Thus Betty Johnson, the Post-Bridges sisters, and William Barker all supplied the names of new suspected witches. These unmarried Andover young people, like their parents and unlike the afflicted girls of Salem Village (who gloried in saying "no", if only to the devil), obediently did as they were told. Directed by the magistrates to confess, they readily did so. Their mothers, aunts, fathers, and uncles sometimes initially resisted the demands for confession, but they did not. Dutifully, they acknowledged their culpability and that of others. Ironically, precisely because they behaved like ideal New England children, they—in company with the afflicted, who went to the opposite extreme—helped to cause the executions of several Andover residents.<sup>46</sup>

This passage appears extraordinary to me for many reasons. To begin, the first sentence troubles our understanding of childhood in Salem still further, as Norton claims 'the crucial significance of confessions by children and youths (below the age of twenty-five)'. For the purposes of this work, I have confined my understanding of childhood to 18 and below, with explanations for each category, but this assumption of a new category of 'youth' is curious in that there is no categorisation of where childhood stops and 'youth' begins; as such, childhood and youth are separate from

each other but both belong to the under-25 category. And what the ‘crucial significance’ of these confessions is about, for Norton, is not the impact on the children and young people’s own lives or their significance as accused child-youth witches within the trials, but in their accusations—named by Norton as ‘confessions’ (although this also follows the language of many trial documents)—towards others. As such, these children are only relevant in their confessions on behalf of adults who were already accused and in accusing new people, and each of these appears to signify a culpability rarely placed on the accused children by other historians and writers about the trials, with the qualified exception of Hite. Martha Carrier may have been accused of all manner of sins by her neighbours already, but according to Norton it is in the testimony of her own children that ‘verified’ such claims that her guilt was confirmed, thus privileging their testimony above that of the adult accusers. Similarly, the children and nephews/nieces of other accused witches are assigned guilt in telling of their own culpability; no matter the above-discussed letter from John Proctor that explained such confessions were the result of fear to the point of distraction and the urging of their relatives to protect themselves.

In the first sentence, Norton’s term ‘significance’ may be about importance at this stage of the narrative, but it can also be read to consider why and how these children mattered or how and what they signified; yet given her claim to ‘crucial’, Norton does not name most of the children she discusses, figuring them rather in terms of their parents, thereby positioning their signification not in terms of their own lives but in relation to those parents. Further, significance is also read in what these children tell about Puritan society and their relative ‘obedience’, again in relation to adults. Norton places these children and ‘youths’ in opposition to their elders in her claim that the parents ‘sometimes initially resisted the demands for confession, but they did not’. But according to documentary evidence, this decision to lump all confessing children of accused witches together is misleading: Richard and Andrew Carrier were tortured into confession, having initially resisted. William Barker Jr. ‘did not deny’ that he had afflicted people at the beginning, but neither did he confirm it, saying only that he ‘could not remember’; it is only as the trial progressed that he admitted to his guilt. And no confession survives for Hannah Tyler; the only assumption that she did, at some point, confess comes from the appeal to the court before her trial in which she recants her confession along with her co-accused. In this demonisation of the accused

Andover children, at no point does Norton mention that confessions were forced or recanted, or that they resulted in trials.

And finally, for this claim, Norton does what no other historian (to the best of my knowledge) has done: in this one paragraph, she reiterates the guilt of the afflicted children—who ‘gloried in saying “no”’ and ‘went to the opposite extreme’—*and* places the accused children alongside them as guilty in the deaths of innocent adult ‘witches’: both are ‘extremes’ and the status of these Andover children is never that of the accused for Norton: their role is of accusers only and, as such, ‘they helped to cause the executions of several Andover residents’. In no other history of the trials have the accused children been so vilified and all children been found so unequivocally guilty: afflicted or accused, Norton’s children cannot escape their culpability. That they did so through behaving as ‘ideal’ Puritan children—obedient to their elders—does not excuse them. Norton’s analysis positions those discussed here within an adult legal status of responsibility, further troubling who and what were children in Salem.

### *‘THE STRENGTH OF MARGARET JACOBS’*

At the age of 16, Salem’s Margaret Jacobs is one of the accused who sits problematically within a claim to childhood in narratives of the trials due to varying assumptions on the relative ages of children and adults between narratives and within legal designations. Like many others, her accusation was a direct or indirect result of her family relations: she was arrested on May 10 along with her grandfather, George Jacobs Sr. on the accusation of Abigail Williams who claimed that Jacobs Sr. ‘had made Margaret set her hand to the book’ and ‘also that the said Margaret had hurt her pretty much to day & at other times & brought her the book several times to night but not before’.<sup>47</sup> Margaret’s father had already fled in fear of such an accusation, and her mother, Rebecca—despite a mental illness of some years’ duration—would be arrested not long afterwards, eventually spending 11 months in jail to Margaret’s nine. Yet Margaret’s tale, even among such a litany of tragedy as this, is often related with a peculiar poignancy, one which results in her being called ‘hero’, ‘brave’, and similar appellations in some historical accounts.

At the time of Margaret’s arrest at this still-early stage of the trial section of the panic, the accused were being offered a stark choice: confess and live or deny the charges and be hanged for witchcraft. Although we

know that this was frequently the case when looking at the trials in retrospect, Margaret's evidence shows how blatant the technique of intimidation was and how early in the process it began; far earlier than the majority of accusations against Andover's children in the subsequent months. As Norton comments:

Margaret's recollection of what Hathorne and Corwin told her at her May 11 examination marks the earliest explicit record of what eventually became of the magistrates' most controversial tactics: preserving the lives of confessors so they could testify against others, while simultaneously prosecuting people who refused to admit their guilt.<sup>48</sup>

While Norton's commentary acts to highlight the importance of this narrative in helping us to understand why so many of the later accused confessed and implicated others in their supposed crimes, it also does what so many other comments on Salem's children do: that is, it positions Margaret's importance primarily in terms of others rather than the effects on Margaret herself.

Yet while Margaret was a frontrunner or exemplar of this judicial technique, she was also anomalous in that she was the only confessed witch to recant her confession, to hold to that recantation, and survive: Samuel Willard Sr. also retracted his confession, but died on the gallows for his honesty. Before this stage was reached, however, Margaret was sufficiently frightened for her life to accuse three others (that we know of as the record for her May 11 court examination has not survived): the Reverend George Burroughs, Alice Parker, and her grandfather, George Jacobs Sr. She even appeared at Parker's trial as an afflicted girl, as the court records noted: 'Margaret Jacobs Charged [Parker] also to her face with seeing her in the North feild on fryday night last about an hour within Night in apparition'.<sup>49</sup> But Margaret's recantation was both too little and too late: all three were hanged on her evidence and that of others.<sup>50</sup>

Much of what we know about Margaret's case can be gleaned from two extant documents, which I quote here in full. The first is a letter written to her still-absent father (who, like Shakespeare's fictional Macduff some 100 years earlier, had cut and run leaving his wife and children to suffer the consequences, despite Margaret's generous address):

From the Dungeon in Salem-Prison, August 20, 92  
Honoured Father,

After my Humble Duty Remembred to you, hoping in the Lord of your good Health, as Blessed be God I enjoy, tho in abundance of Affliction, being close confined here in a loathsome Dungeon, the Lord look down in mercy upon me, not knowing how soon I shall be put to Death, by means of the Afflicted Persons; my Grand-Father having suffered already, and all his Estate Seized for the King. The reason of my Confinement is this, I having, through the Magistrates Threatenings, and my own Vile and Wretched Heart, confessed several things contrary to my Conscience and Knowledg, tho to the Wounding of my own Soul, the Lord pardon me for it; but, Oh! the terrors of a wounded Conscience who can bear. But blessed be the Lord, he would not let me go on in my Sins, but in mercy I hope to my Soul would not suffer me to keep it in any longer, but I was forced to confess the truth of all before the Magistrates, who would not believe me, but tis their pleasure to put me in here, and God knows how soon I shall be put to Death. Dear Father, let me beg your Prayers to the Lord on my behalf, and send us a Joyful and Happy meeting in Heaven. My Mother poor Woman is very Crazy, and remembers her kind Love to you, and to Uncle; viz., D.A. So leaving you to the protection of the Lord, I rest your Dutiful Daughter,

Margaret Jacobs.<sup>51</sup>

While we cannot know if this letter ever reached her father, it serves now to give us a more personal account of what it meant to feel responsible for the fate of others and, conversely, the peace to be found in honesty and, despite everything, in the goodness and justice of God, even if his human representatives on earth had failed Margaret and all others so terribly. However, in doing so, this letter also works to trouble an assumed divide between the afflicted girls and accused children still further: after all, Margaret was not the only child to straddle both sides of the fence, with Abigail Hobbs and Mary Warren appearing for both sides at the early stages of the trials (Dorcas/Dorothy was also both accuser and accused, but never appeared in court as an ‘afflicted girl’), followed by all of the Andover children in the later stages. There were no accused children who maintained their innocence from the first accusation; none except Margaret to recant and hold to it; and none except Margaret, and Andrew and Richard Carrier, to assert their innocence at all in the extant records. Such a letter as this reminds us why that might be: although we know from our retrospective position that no children were hanged, those so accused did not.

Margaret was eventually indicted for afflicting Elizabeth Hubbard sometime around September 14, 1692, although Rosenthal et al. tell us

that the date is an approximation.<sup>52</sup> However, she was not brought to trial until the following January, with Calef reporting an extraordinary reason why she avoided a September trial that may well have resulted in her execution, with witches who were still claiming their innocence frequently executed at that time. Calef claims: 'At the time appointed for her Tryal, she had an Imposthume [abscess] in her head, which was her Escape.'<sup>53</sup> It is a curious claim, that illness was an excuse for not executing a witch when innocence was not. Rosenthal et al. note that this posited reason for her survival 'seems unlikely' and postulate that her young age might be one possible alternative; however, given that the 14-year-old Abigail Hobbs was found guilty and sentenced to death and that four other children were brought to trial, despite her full and frank confession, this also seems unlikely.<sup>54</sup>

Margaret was finally brought to trial in January 1693, and the second document written by her—in a timely reminder that there were Salem children who could write beyond a 'mark', and not just in the devil's book—was a letter to the magistrates, probably intended as evidence at this trial although there is no documentary record of its having been admitted. It reads:

The humble declaration of Margaret Jacobs unto the honoured court now sitting at Salem, sheweth,

That whereas your poor and humble declarant being closely confined here in Salem goal for the crime of witchcraft, which crime thanks be to the Lord I am altogether ignorant of, as will appear at the great day of judgment: May it please the honoured court, I was cried out upon by some of the possessed persons, as afflicting them; whereupon I was brought to my examination, which persons at the sight of me fell down, which did very much startle and affright me. The Lord above knows I knew nothing, in the least measure, how or who afflicted them; they told me, without doubt I did, or else they would not fall down at me; they told me, if I would not confess, I should be put down into the dungeon and would be hanged, but if I would confess I should have my life; the which did so affright me, with my own vile wicked heart, to save my life; made me make the like confession I did, which confession, may it please the honoured court, is altogether false and untrue. The very first night after I had made confession, I was in such horror of conscience that I could not sleep for fear the devil should carry me away for telling such horrid lies. I was, may it please the honoured court, sworn to my confession, as I understand since, but then, at that time, was ignorant of it, not knowing what an oath did mean. The Lord, I hope, in



whom I trust, out of the abundance of his mercy, will forgive me my false forswearing myself. What I said, was altogether false against my grandfather, and Mr. Burroughs, which I did to save my life and to have my liberty; but the Lord, charging it to my conscience, made me in so much horror, that I could not contain myself before I had denied my confession, which I did though I saw nothing but death before me, chusing rather death with a quiet conscience, than to live in such horror, which I could not suffer. Where, upon my denying my confession, I was committed to close prison, where I have enjoyed more felicity in spirit, a thousand times, than I did before in my enlargement.

And now, may it please your honours, your declarant, having, in part, given your honours a description of my condition, do leave it to your honours pious and judicious discretions, to take pity and compassion on my young and tender years, to act and do with me, as the Lord above and your honours shall see good, having no friend, but the Lord, to plead my cause for me; not being guilty in the least measure of the crime of witch-craft, nor any other sin that deserves death from man; and your poor and humble declarant shall for ever pray, as she is bound in duty, for your honours happiness in this life and eternal felicity in the world to come. So prays your honours declarant.

Margaret Jacobs<sup>55</sup>

This document is couched in terms used in both previous and later pleas for clemency from the judges, possibly disturbing any claim that Margaret had written this herself, but its language is interesting in several points. Firstly, and as mentioned in Chap. 2, Margaret positions the afflicted girls as not just afflicted but as ‘possessed’; as such, the question is raised again of what differentiates the afflicted from the accused if both can be used by the devil. This letter further testifies to the power of the accused girls to cause terror in the accused within the courtroom; no matter that many of the accused were the same age or younger than Margaret herself, it appears that they—as well as the judges—had the power of life and death in their hands: ‘they told me, if I would not confess, I should be put down into the dungeon and would be hanged, but if I would confess I should have my life’. And this letter, as did Margaret’s letter to her father, also shows that a denial of witchcraft was not a denial of the existence of the devil: ‘I could not sleep for fear the devil should carry me away’. Margaret’s plea for her life is a testament to a strong belief in the forces of the supernatural in Salem and to why the testimony of the afflicted girls was taken so seriously. Indeed, it raises certain questions: if Margaret’s belief in the devil was this

strong, how far would that also be true of the afflicted girls? Was Margaret an anomaly or proving the rule among the young of Salem? And, if she was representative in this case, the fears of the accused for their immortal souls must have been terrifying indeed, while the extent of deliberate and knowing lies by the afflicted must be, if not brought into question, at least open to further examination.

Like her mother, Margaret was found not guilty and discharged; but she was not to leave prison until May due to the family's straightened circumstances after George Jacobs Sr.'s estate was seized, leaving the family destitute. Upham reports that Margaret's outstanding jail fees were finally and generously paid by a stranger, a fisherman named 'Gammon', who took pity on her, although she and her family eventually paid him back; however, Rosenthal notes: 'This story is difficult to confirm or refute.'<sup>56</sup> She finally leaves the records—as do so many—with a 1710 petition from her finally returned father for restitution for his father's estate and the prison costs of Rebecca and Margaret.<sup>57</sup>

In later narratives of Margaret's case, she appears largely in a highly sympathetic light, her status as anomalous among both the children and adults of Salem in her courage to face death knowingly for telling the truth well recognised. Starkey constructs Margaret as 'an upright girl' and notes that she was allowed to visit her grandfather and Burroughs in prison, receiving a pardon from them both for her accusations; indeed, her grandfather changed his will (useless as it was, his estates all being forfeit to the crown and the unwarranted greed of Sheriff Corwin) to favour her.<sup>58</sup> Hill, similarly, figures Margaret as 'this brave girl' in her narrative.<sup>59</sup> But the last word must go to Rosenthal, who tells her 'extraordinary story'—one that he figures as 'a reason for some of the sentimentality of the nineteenth century'—in terms of what she might have been, had she chosen another road.<sup>60</sup> He writes:

Mary Warren and Margaret Jacobs offer models of absolute polarities as to the choices that an accused young woman might make. As Mary Warren, free from prison, relentlessly accused one person after another of heinous crimes, Margaret Jacobs remained in prison facing death. That the two young women reached their crossroads at approximately the same time offers a guidepost to viewing the episode retrospectively, but for people living at the time the implications were closer, starker, more difficult to assess. Margaret and others had no reason to believe that in the end people as young as she would not go to the gallows: From their perspective, they

faced hanging, and one does not often find people with the strength of Margaret Jacobs.<sup>61</sup>

This comparison between the two young girls, while constructing them under a binary of just two possible responses to their positions, still figures the trigger for that response as the same: that of fear, both of the death penalty in this world and, as we saw in Margaret's own testimonies, judgement in the next. As such, Margaret Jacobs' story is a curious one in that—much as the afflicted girls did—her accusations sent innocent people to their deaths, albeit that they were made under enormous emotional and psychological pressure and possibly in response to the expected 'obedience' of which Norton writes in terms of later accused children; yet, in what is drawn as a binary contrast, her recantation figures her rather as a hero than a villain as the afflicted have frequently been described. Recalling the biblical claim that 'there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons', Margaret is constructed as far more brave than those who claimed their innocence and that of others from the outset and frequently died for their assertions.<sup>62</sup> As such, despite Rosenthal's claims that such an episode was 'more difficult to assess' for people at the time, Margaret Jacobs' position in history is one that has been rewritten under a tide of sentimentality that has lasted way beyond Rosenthal's claim to the nineteenth century, obscuring somewhat the complex nature of such a case in the need to assign to Margaret not just a verdict of innocence but one that exalts her above those children demonised by Norton for their obedience.

### NARRATING ELIZABETH COLSON

While there are many more tales of accused children that have received little attention, I wish to close this consideration of individual and family cases of accused children with Elizabeth Colson (also named variously Coulson, Collson, Colsen, and Carlson in court records and narratives), a child who both confirms and disrupts other accused child narratives as representative of a nebulous whole. An inhabitant of Reading, 15-year-old Elizabeth was arrested along with her mother, Mary (although no arrest warrant for Mary survives), her aunt Sarah, and her grandmother, Lydia Dustin, who died in prison on March 10, despite being found not guilty. Elizabeth was complained of by Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam at an early stage of the trials—May 14—alongside eight others, although

Colson was the only accused child and the only person on the list from Reading; like many others, she was accused of acts of witchcraft against Ann Putnam (probably Jr.), Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, and other afflicted girls of Salem Village; how they knew her name and in what respect they knew her is not clear, given the 15-mile distance between the two towns. A warrant for her arrest was issued to the Constable of Reading on the same date; however, the Officer's Return states that 'I have made a Diligent Search for ye aboue named Elizabeth Collson and find shee is fled and by the best Information she is att Boston in order to bee shipt ofe; and by way of Escape to bee transported to some other Countrey'.<sup>63</sup> Although this report claims agency in that 'shee is fled', it also positions Elizabeth as largely in the hands of others in the passive voice of 'to bee shipt off' and 'to bee transported'; possibly on account of her young age, though this is necessarily speculation. While Elizabeth was eventually captured exactly four months later on September 14, she remained hidden long enough to avoid facing the Court of Oyer and Terminer. In the meantime, another arrest warrant was issued on May 17; evidence was given against her by Susannah Sheldon on the same date.

By the time of her arrest in Cambridge, Elizabeth was aged 16. Forty-three-year-old William Arnold describes a September 10 attempt at her arrest thus:

I saw said Elisab. Colsen run from ye back dore and gott over into John Dixes field. and I called to her being not far from her and asked why she ran away for I would Catch her. she said nothing, but ran away and quickly fell down and got up againe and ran again shaking her hand behinde her as it were striking at me. [...] I Endeavored to sett my dog upon her, and ye dog would not minde her but went ye Contrary way, and yn I offering to Strike at her wth my Stick she seemed to run under ye fence and so disappeared.<sup>64</sup>

This account, while it may appear comical when read in full due to the abject failures of Arnold not just to catch her but even to get his dog to obey him, it also shows the length that adults would go to in an attempt to apprehend a 16-year-old girl—threats, an attempted beating, and an attempted (if not achieved) dog attack—while giving testament to the fear this man had of the young girl witch: the claim that she looked as if she might strike him, even from a distance; a claim in the wider text of 'a great Cat' that ran at him; and his fear when she seemingly disappeared. But it

also gives testament to Elizabeth's own fear: that she ran, perhaps literally, for her life, falling and stumbling, but managing to escape, if only for a few more days. In common with Margaret Jacobs, where fear was a factor in both accusation and confession, the driver for so much of children's (and adults') behaviour is the same.

Apart from one more claim against her around the time of her attempted arrest, nothing further is heard of Elizabeth in the records until a mittimus of December 10, 1692.<sup>65</sup> By this point, her mother, aunt, and grandmother had been found not guilty; however, Rosenthal et al. tell us that, while they may have briefly been freed, they were returned to prison for non-payment of jail fees.<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth was released on March 2; her mother and aunt on March 23; and, as already noted, her grandmother died in prison in the intervening time, on March 10. The dates suggest the possibility that bail money was found for Elizabeth first due to her young age; but this again is necessarily mere speculation.

So why discuss Elizabeth's Colson's case, as opposed to any of the other accused children not yet considered? Elizabeth both confirms and troubles the type of the accused Essex County child. Like so many others, the warrant for her arrest was tied to accusations against older family members, with an assumption that witchcraft had been passed from mother to daughter throughout the family line. Yet she bucks the trend in that she is the only child known to have escaped, if only for a few months; many accused adults, including the Philip English family, also escaped or were helped to freedom, although it often cost them in the confiscation of their property. Her story is also frequently passed over in histories beyond a line or two, and she has failed, as yet, to make any appearance in the fiction of Salem. Her case might well therefore be considered one of recuperation and reclamation rather than an analysis that expands our understanding of child witches in Salem as a group; yet this story also serves to show how difficult it is to position the accused children in this way, due to the differences and anomalies between each case.

### ACCUSATION AND ABSENCE

In considering these accused children (and wishing I had space to devote to narratives of John Proctor's children, the Faulkner children, the Johnson children, the Bridges children, Sarah Phelps, and Sarah Wilson Jr.), I have claimed that their stories are largely absent from narratives of the trials; yet, of course, all the information I have been able to find depends on such

narratives being present. How, then, can we consider the accused as absent from accounts of the Salem witch trials?

To begin, we must consider what it means to claim absence and what a reading of what, by definition, is not there is relevant to this enquiry. Jacques Derrida considers readings of absence in the archive. Considering Freud's archive, he asks: 'We will always wonder [...] what may have burned of his secret passions, of his correspondence, or of his "life". Burned without him, without remains and without knowledge. With no possible response, be it spectral or not [...] without a name, without the least symptom, and without even an ash.'<sup>67</sup> While I have considered this concept in an earlier work, this quote struck me anew on reading it again—in an almost uncanny sense, of what I expected to be an unproblematic return and which turned out to be something else entirely, something that Freud figures as unhomely or *unheimlich*—due to the language that suddenly seems to be talking about Salem and other witch-hunts, with its appeal not just to what we do not know about Salem—missing documents of full trials; the potential for missing 'witches'; the unknown fates of some of the afflicted and accused children—but to burning, to 'without remains', and to 'no possible response, be it spectral or not'.<sup>68</sup> This matters to our analysis because, even in the possibility of a spectral response or the 'ash' that is not there, we hope for a return, a resurrection. Every denial, every 'without', brings an uncanny return because it seems that what is not there is just as important as what is. As Rosenthal et al. claim: 'The surviving witchcraft legal papers, though extensive, are far from complete. Even the most cursory perusal [...] will show significant gaps in which now missing documents can be presumed to have been originally produced and used.' They add: 'Some of these documents may still be awaiting discovery, either in private, unknowing hands or buried away in institutions and not yet uncovered.'<sup>69</sup> While I will discuss the Salem archive further in Chap. 8 of this work, its relevance here is that any claim to an absence is also based on a simultaneous claim to presence: that we know what is absent and also what cannot be known. In terms of Salem's children, then, absence can be quantified in terms of its relative status to the presence of others and as what we expect to see or feel we should see but do not—for example, in the focus on Dorcas/Dorothy and the afflicted girls to the exclusion or occlusion of the accused children—but also, as in Derrida's terms, the knowledge that there is much we do not know but still want to know.

Of course, to consider the 24 or so accused children (those 17 or under) as totally absent from contemporary records would be disingenuous at best and misleading at worst, particularly considering that the records themselves are necessarily incomplete due to both the time lag between seventeenth-century Essex County and the twenty-first-century time of writing and the loss of almost all records of the trials themselves; yet even in the still relatively large volume of extant records and contemporary commentaries, the accused children rarely take centre stage. There are a number of likely explanations for this. The first is that almost no children were accused in the early stages of the trials: Dorcas/Dorothy Good was first on March 23; followed by Abigail Hobbs on April 18, with the bulk of the accusations centring on the July–September time period. Similarly, only Dorcas/Dorothy, the Proctor children, and possibly Margaret Jacobs came from Salem Village: the majority of the accused children—with one or two notable exceptions, such as Abigail Hobbs and Elizabeth Colson—lived in Andover. Further, nearly all of the accused children were also accusing children, giving testimony against others, so records focus on both aspects of their role. Additionally, no children were executed, even though Abigail was sentenced to death. And, finally, most of the accused children had one or more parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and/or cousins who were also accused witches, and even Cotton Mather constructed their testimony as primarily important in how it impacted on the guilty status of said adult family members.

However, my claim to an absence of the accused children in the histories of the trials still seems fair. After all, in over 300 years since the culmination of the trials, not a single history has been dedicated to Salem's children, either accusers or accused, and their role in the witch panic; and while chapters galore have been dedicated to the afflicted girls, and multitudes of papers have been written in an attempt to discover the truth behind their actions, the same cannot be said about the accused children, with Hite's work on Andover the only study to consider them at any length. Even if others devote some space to a single accused child, they rarely consider these children either *as* accused, given they were so frequently also accusers; as a group; or beyond one or two individual cases, such as that of Dorothy/Dorcas Good. As such, Essex County's accused children remain peripheral to Salem's story: an afterthought, only relevant where their lives touch on accused adults or afflicted girls. It may be that the very claim to innocence that has so often been voiced to support the executed and accused adults is responsible, in that the innocence of children accused of witchcraft is

taken for granted. And it is in their signification of something other—the known innocent child which, therefore, does not need to be read—that they cannot be seen; adult analysis glides right past to move onto more contentious groups. After all, there is no mystery about the accused: they are simply an innocent group and, as such, they have no individuality and no stories to tell.

Yet, as we have learned from Mather's blood-and-thunder sermon on the duty of children to their parents, the innocence of childhood in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay was not assured and needed guidance, even if a number of accused adult witches, such as Rebecca Nurse, compared their own innocence to that of 'the child unborn'.<sup>70</sup> Even Hite, in his welcome consideration of why so many young people were accused in Andover, notes the following document, claiming a possible reason that younger people were targeted for accusation. An order issued by the town's selectmen on March 14, 1692 reads:

And where there is grievous Complaints of great prophaneness of the Sabbath both in the times of exercise and at noon time to the great dishonour of God (illegible) and all of religion & the grieve of many serious Christians, by young persons, we order and require of tything men & constables to take care to prevent such great & shameful miscarriages, which are so much observed and Complained of.<sup>71</sup>

As such, the town records noted that young people in Andover were causing problems, at least on the Sabbath day, to such a degree that constables and townsmen were required to step in, and this during the process of the trials so close to home. While history occludes the names and ages of those so accused, the designation of them 'as young people' puts all such under suspicion and reiterates Mather's later polemic that children were not necessarily the perfectly obedient Puritan children but far more like Wordsworth's Romantic child some 100 years later, one that may come 'trailing clouds of Glory' from heaven at birth, but who is overshadowed by 'shades of the prison house' as they begin to grow.<sup>72</sup> As such, any claim to the innocence of the accused children as that which can be taken for granted is overshadowed by contemporary accounts of childhood and 'youth'; by many historians' assumptions of guilt in the actions of the afflicted girls; and by the fact that so many of the accused straddled the divide between accused and accuser. Yet their stories deserve far more attention than they have received so far.



## NOTES

1. Rose (1986) *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, Verso, 2005), p. 67.
2. See Chap. 1 for further details on the Mora trials.
3. Sebald, p. 57.
4. Sebald, p. 31.
5. Sebald, pp. 35–36.
6. Karlsen, p. 64.
7. Karlsen, p. 65.
8. Particularly given I am writing this early on lockdown in London at the time of the 2019–2020 Coronavirus pandemic, where the movement of just a few people from the centre of origin has caused a wider and more deadly spread in other countries, no matter than China is still positioned as the epicentre of the outbreak.
9. A more comprehensive look at the histories of the Andover children can be found in Richard Hite's *In the Shadow of Salem*; although this work is not always factually consistent and frequently relies on conjecture, it focuses on childhood more than any other work on Salem. Mary Beth Norton discusses the history of Abigail Hobbs in her seminal work, *In the Devil's Snare*. My accounts of these children in this section are informed by these works, as well as by court documentation and other works. My thanks to these two authors.
10. Hite, p. 173.
11. Hite, pp. 199–200.
12. Rosenthal et al., p. 550.
13. Rosenthal et al., p. 559.
14. Rosenthal et al., p. 560.
15. Rosenthal et al., p. 825.
16. Rosenthal et al., p. 571.
17. Rosenthal et al., p. 663.
18. Rosenthal et al., p. 861.
19. Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 55.
20. Hite, p. 183.
21. Hite, p. 166.
22. Hite, pp. 211–212.
23. Rosenthal et al., p. 660.
24. Rosenthal et al., p. 661.
25. Rosenthal et al., p. 961.
26. Rosenthal et al., pp. 737–738.
27. Rosenthal et al., pp. 750–751.
28. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 128.
29. Rosenthal et al., p. 323.

30. Rosenthal et al., p. 318.
31. Hite, p. 211.
32. Hansen, p. 86.
33. Hansen, p. 190.
34. Kathleen Kent (2008) *The Heretic's Daughter* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company), p. 40.
35. Rosenthal et al., p. 471.
36. Rosenthal et al., pp. 472–473, 474.
37. Rosenthal et al., p. 479.
38. Rosenthal et al., p. 483.
39. Rosenthal et al., p. 486.
40. Rosenthal et al., p. 486.
41. Rosenthal et al., pp. 540–541.
42. Rosenthal, p. 541.
43. Hite, p. 92.
44. Hite, p. 98.
45. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 125.
46. Norton, pp. 264–265.
47. Rosenthal et al., p. 254.
48. Norton, p. 161.
49. Rosenthal et al., p. 261.
50. Although Rosenthal et al. note: ‘Although Margaret Jacobs later confirmed counterfeiting in the cases of George Burroughs and George Jacobs Sr., no confirmation of an admission of her counterfeiting against Alice Parker survives’; p. 262n.
51. Rosenthal et al., p. 549.
52. Rosenthal et al., p. 637.
53. Calef in Burr, p. 366.
54. Rosenthal et al., p. 230n49.
55. Rosenthal et al., pp. 742–743.
56. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 122.
57. Rosenthal et al., pp. 874–875.
58. Starkey, pp. 198, 231: she uses the phrase, ‘an upright girl’, twice.
59. Hill, p. 138.
60. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 49.
61. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 50.
62. Luke 15:7, international version, <https://biblehub.com/luke/15-7.htm> [accessed 9 March 2020].
63. Rosenthal et al., p. 271.
64. Rosenthal et al., p. 626.
65. Rosenthal et al., p. 732.
66. Rosenthal et al., p. 732.

67. Jacques Derrida (1995) *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), p. 101.
68. I also discuss Freud's concept of absence and archive in my earlier 2020 work, *Louisa May Alcott and the Textual Child* (London: Palgrave Macmillan); however, as explained, I selected a slightly different quote for analysis here.
69. Rosenthal et al., p. 47.
70. Rosenthal et al., p. 158.
71. Hite, p. 109.
72. Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', p. 702.



## Disturbing Boundaries: Witches, Mothers, and the ‘Leaky’ Family

As Chap. 4 on the accused children has discussed, examining the role of children in the Salem crisis is problematic; not just because of the previously discussed difficulties with defining who or what a child was and is, but because of its position within and inextricable links to the family. This chapter will therefore expand on the exploration of the relationship between child witch and accused adult family member in the Salem witch trials, which began with an analysis of the literature surrounding the families of Andover in Chap. 4. Beginning with an analysis of what constituted a family in late seventeenth-century Salem, I will take the premise of the ‘leaky female’ body proposed by theorists such as Mary Douglas and Judith Butler and expand it to discuss how children and other family members are, by definition, implicated in and part of the very leakiness of the mother-body, and how such a claim might impact readings of such children during the trials and in later analyses, with a particular focus on the relationship between the mother, the child, and the familiar. Further, this chapter will explore how this theory might be brought to bear on narratives of the afflicted girls and their place within the family structure, finally considering how the family has been leveraged to underpin readings of guilt and innocence on both sides of the assumed divide between Salem’s children.

## THE FAMILY IN SALEM

As has been discussed in previous chapters, many historians' constructions of the aberrance of Salem's children have been derived from expectations of a proper Puritan childhood based on an analysis of contemporary seventeenth-century documents such as Cotton Mather's *A Family Well-Ordered*; but comparatively little has been written in the intervening centuries specifically about either Puritan childhood or Puritan family life in late-seventeenth century New England except as they touch on larger societal concerns of, and about, the time.<sup>1</sup> However, studies have been undertaken on early modern childhood in England that might shed some light on the family structure in Salem. For example, C. John Sommerville's 1992 work, *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England*, claims: 'Sustained interest in children in England began with the Puritans, who were the first to puzzle over their nature and their place in society'.<sup>2</sup> Such a claim, along with the work's title, positions childhood as something that preceded its own discovery, and also objectifies childhood as a discrete and separate entity that was and is available to be studied by adults. In this short quote, Sommerville also appears to both agree and disagree with Phillips' and Ariès' contention that childhood only existed from the seventeenth century as he agrees with the timing but places both the analysis and therefore the childhood being analysed primarily with a limited religious and social group. Further, while Anna French's 2020 edited collection, *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction*, successfully grapples with the issues in defining and therefore examining childhood in the seventeenth century, its scope is much wider: from 1500 to 1700 and focused on childhood in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, while each of these works (and others) might aid in any exploration of childhood and the family structure in Essex County in the 1690s, they must be treated with caution when attempting to apply their analyses and conclusions to family life and society across the ocean.

Yet further analyses would undoubtedly be helpful in attempting to ascertain the positions of afflicted and accused children within their families during the Salem panic. After all, in the web of accusation and counter-accusation, and as has already been discussed in this work, the arrest of one family member frequently resulted in further arrests—Rebecca Nurse's family was a case in point, with her sisters Mary Esty and Sarah Cloyce arrested after her conviction—and children were frequently arrested either alongside a parent or soon afterwards, with their examinations reflecting

back on the assumed guilt of a particular parent (usually the mother) in making them a witch, as was the case with the children of Martha Carrier. In addition, the role of the afflicted girls has often been read through their family connections and an assumed family factionalism in and between villages. Ann Putnam Jr., for example, is frequently positioned as a pawn in her family's feuds with other families: in Boyer and Nissenbaum's *Salem Possessed*, for example, their dismissal of 'the girls themselves' as 'decisive shapers' leads to a reading of the animosity between the Putnam and Porter families from which Ann's testimonies against at least 21 accused witches and her father's complaints against 24 is figured as a 'response' to their 'rage and frustration' about their social and financial difficulties.<sup>4</sup> Hite has also commented at some length on the family connections between accused witches in Andover, noting that the extended Ingalls family (ancestors of *Little House on the Prairie* author Laura Ingalls Wilder, as he points out) had 15 of its members accused of witchcraft.<sup>5</sup> As these examples show, neither child accusers nor accused stand alone but were and are frequently situated as part of a larger and extended family unit.

But what are we talking about when we talk about these families? What did the Essex County family look like in the late seventeenth century, and why does it matter to this analysis? As I have touched upon in previous chapters, there appears to be a gap between the ideal Puritan family often produced by literature and its shadowy, real-life counterpart. To begin, any assumption of a normative nuclear family can quickly be dispelled. To return to Cotton Mather's *A Family Well Ordered*, for example, in the duty of parents to their children can also be found the duty of master to servant. In his second chapter, on promoting 'the piety and salvation of [...] children', Mather writes: 'But let it be remembered, that our servants [others in our home] are in some sort our children. Our whole household, as well as the children that are our offspring, are to be taught in the way of the Lord' [parentheses within text].<sup>6</sup> As such, while infantilising any adult servants, Mather also positions both adult and child helpers as part of the family and therefore included in the duties of parents as head of the household, while also expanding the family unit to include any people that might be living in that household.

Such testimony to the non-nuclear family is mirrored by Edmund S. Morgan in his helpful 1944 work (revised and enlarged in 1966), *The Puritan Family*. Morgan tells us:

The removal of a child from his parents when he was only fourteen years old or less seems a little strange, in view of the importance which the Puritans attached to family relations [...] Not only were boys put out to learn a trade, but girls were put out to learn housekeeping.<sup>7</sup>

In this claim, the repetition of 'put out' places children with no choice under parental decision-making, yet Morgan places the duties of parents within bounds of an assumed family affection that is not so apparent in Mather's blood-and-thunder work in which 'duty' is all, and a duty that exists not just within the extended family unit but is also due and beneficial to wider society. Morgan accounts for the apparent strangeness between what he constructs as two opposing positions of affection and sending children to live and work outside the house by claiming:

Psychologically this separation of parents and children may have had a sound foundation. The child left home just at the time when parental discipline causes increasing friction, just at the time when a child begins to assert his independence. By allowing a strange master to take over the disciplinary function, the parent could meet the child upon a plane of affection and friendliness. At the same time the child would be taught good behavior by someone who would not forgive him any mischief out of affection for his person.<sup>8</sup>

This claim to a time when 'a child begins to assert his independence' appears to contradict the above claim to the child's lack of agency under parental rule, although it again situates stages of childhood as that which can be known as such by adults. Morgan's further account is also a little curious in its move from the past tense of Puritan New England—'may have had [...] The child left home'—into the present of 'causes friction' and 'a child begins', with the present tense continuing through the remainder of the passage although frequently also in the conditional. As such, Morgan's construction creates a split between modern-day childhood and its seventeenth-century counterpart, with what he constructs as twentieth-century readings imposed upon children of the past, exacerbated further by Morgan's conditionals of 'could' and 'would'; although such historical readings would rely on prior claims to what seventeenth and twentieth centuries each mean. Yet while we might dismiss this as speculation, especially as it is not evidently based on any particular case or cases, it is again of interest in its assumption of family affection: not because

there is any reason to believe that love did not exist in Puritan families, but because this passage appears to discount any commercial imperative for such decisions and overlooks the necessary placing of children outside of the home due to death or incapacity within their birth families, as was the case with many of Salem's 'bound' girls. However, there is also an assumption that there would be no affection in blended families, thereby restating the normative nuclear family unit, if we understand family to be built on ties of affection as stated here by Morgan.

Richard Weisman also discusses the placing out of children in seventeenth-century Massachusetts and its impact on families in relation to poverty. He claims:

In more extreme cases, an entire household would be restructured by indenturing the children to various members of the town or by putting the parents out to service. That parents who were on public relief should employ their children to help defray the expenses was a routine expectation; if they did not, the town could order that the children be put to work.<sup>9</sup>

While Weisman's comments echo those of Morgan in some ways, they also provide an additional commentary on both the contraction and expansion of the New England family and on the relative position of different social classes. In its assumption of power over families, the depersonalised 'town' took over the parental role, thus infantilising the parents and displacing them in relation to their own children. Further, the children are moved by 'the town' into the adult space by forcing them into work and to defray their parents' expenses, with the normative parental role again disrupted by the role reversal of parent and child.

As we might assume from such texts on the Puritan family, families in Essex County were rarely as straightforward as either a single nuclear family household or a domestic relationship between parents and their biological children, with the family home often containing multiple generations of the same family and other occupants who were either tangentially related or not related at all, while other family members who might be expected to reside in the same household within a normative nuclear family unit were absent. In the home of Samuel Parris, for example, in addition to his wife and children lived Tituba and John Indian, both slaves, and Abigail Williams, Parris' niece: historians tend to assume that Williams' parents had died prior to this point, but little is known of her or her family either before or after the trials. Similarly to Williams, by



1692, Mercy Lewis had been left an orphan by an Indian attack that killed both her parents; she resided as a domestic servant in the home of Thomas Putnam and his family. And Mary Warren lived as a domestic servant in the house of John and Elizabeth Proctor in 1692: like Williams, little is known of her life or her parents before her involvement in the Salem trials. As such, and as has been discussed elsewhere, many of those most frequently termed ‘the afflicted girls’—those who appeared early in the trials, accused many, and were resident in Salem Village—were already missing parents and were therefore not living with their birth families when the panic began but were part of a blended or extended family unit, with the boundaries of the family therefore necessarily blurred and its influence extended but difficult to quantify.

Blended families frequently existed in late-seventeenth century New England in other ways too: due to early death rates in adulthood resulting from childbirth, Indian raids, and illness (not to mention ‘witchcraft’), those left widowed would frequently remarry, bringing a step-parent (frequently a stepmother) into the family. Abigail Hobbs, for example, had a stepmother, Deliverance; George Burroughs was charged with killing previous wives and children by witchcraft; while Bridget Bishop and Sarah Osborn, among others, were under suspicion in part due to their disregard for female social convention in marrying again after the death of a first husband. And in the Proctor family, at the beginning of 1792, John Proctor was married to his third wife after the deaths of the previous two; his latest wife, Elizabeth, was pregnant with what was to be her seventh child, named after his father but born posthumously in 1693; but this was to be John Proctor’s 18th known child (perhaps one reason why he is so frequently sexualised in fictions of Salem). As such, his household contained not just his wife and Mary Warren, but some combination of his children from three marriages. Boyer and Nissenbaum discuss the possible impact of the stepmother in *Salem Possessed*, in a section called ‘Stepmothers and Witches’, claiming that the appearance of Mary Veren Putnam as stepmother was both responsible for the Putnam family’s downturn in fortune and, in a parallel to the story of *Hansel and Gretel*, as the uncanny double of the witch that must also be destroyed. Under this reading, older women who may have either deliberately or inadvertently harmed the Putnam clan in some way or signified the crone-like figure of the stepmother witch—women such as Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse—became targets.

Nurse's accusation problematises the family unit in other ways too. Boyer and Nissenbaum claim:

Rebecca was particularly vulnerable to accusation in 1692: years earlier, her mother had been accused of witchcraft (though never arrested or brought to trial) and local gossip had it that the taint had been passed onto her daughters. (Indeed, probably because the accusations against Rebecca jogged memories about the earlier episode, her two sisters were later accused as well.)<sup>10</sup>

Boyer and Nissenbaum claim here that witchcraft accusations in Salem were not just a result of current family ties, therefore, but of prior ones too: Rebecca Nurse's mother may have been long dead, and the accusations against her unsubstantiated, but 'the taint had been passed onto her daughters'. As such, and despite their ages, it might be argued that the three ageing sisters remained children in their association with witchcraft; subservient to the mother who either deliberately or inadvertently passed her own witchcraft onto her daughters. While Boyer and Nissenbaum qualify this claim by attributing it to local gossip—not to be taken seriously, perhaps, although such gossip was the ruin of many—the 'taint' of witchcraft in the family was one that brought many accused witches to Salem's prisons. As such, I will analyse the mother-daughter-witch relationship more closely to consider how this family relationship was constructed, troubled, and leveraged in Salem's witchcraft accusations.

### THE LEAKY FEMALE

The assumed relationship between women and witchcraft, and therefore the relationship between motherhood and witchcraft, has been secured, with the image of the crone-witch, jealous of the beautiful girl-child usurping her place, long since passed into a fairy tale. As such, a link between motherhood and witchcraft, and therefore the assumption of witch mother producing witch child, dominates many histories. One of the principal tropes of the witch accusations in European cases (though curiously not in Salem) is that of the midwife and her uncanny relationship with the child and the mother, in which she is both double and invert.<sup>11</sup> In her work on the links between motherhood and witchcraft in early modern England, *Malevolent Nurture*, Deborah Willis claims that 'Witches were women, I believe, because women are mothers'.<sup>12</sup> She notes how

frequently accusations against women, particularly in village witchcraft cases, centred around depictions of the maternal, from the unexplained death of a child after a quarrel between its mother and an older woman, often a midwife; through the blaming of women for such domestic and quasi-maternal wrongs as disrupting cow-milking, butter-making, and the laying of hens' eggs; to the search for 'teats' from which such women might suckle a familiar and a similar use of 'poppets' to cause pain and death in their victims. Such assumptions about mothers were not confined to old England but were present in New England too. Cotton Mather claimed:

Among the Ghastly Instances of the *success* which those Bloody Witches have had, we have seen even some of their own Children, so dedicated unto the Devil, that in their Infancy, it is found, the *Imps* have sucked them, and rendered them Venomous to a Prodigy.<sup>13</sup>

Mather's assumption is not necessarily of an active role in the mother of dedicating her child to witchcraft, but that this is a symptom of the worst cases. However, Mather's language is not always clear: he could be claiming that the witches are 'so dedicated unto the Devil' or that the children are, with the dedication therefore that of the mother to the devil, with the child positioned as the tribute or property to be passed across. Similarly, Mather's claim might be that the 'Imps' have sucked *from* the children, or that the children have been suckled *by* the Imps. While we cannot know his intent, this slipperiness of language around the roles of child and mother in the witch family is played out again and again across narratives of such claimed or fantasised events.

Yet why such demonisation of the mother role, and how did this frequently repeated assumption play out in the Salem trials, given that the midwife trope was largely absent? To understand the first question, it may be of interest to consider the woman as a mother from a theoretical point of view. Judith Butler considers the limits of the female body in her 1993 work, *Bodies That Matter*, in which she considers the materiality of the body in terms of the performativity of gender. Butler claims: 'Plato's phantasmic economy virtually deprives the feminine of a *morphe*, a shape, for as the receptacle, the feminine is a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless non-thing which cannot be named. And as nurse, mother, womb, the feminine is synecdochally collapsed into a set of figural functions.'<sup>14</sup> Butler is considering the impossibility of the female form here

(although such a form returns in the claim to its deprivation under Plato's theorem), but we can also read this in terms of the relational role of the woman: as receptacle for the man's seed; as container for the growing embryo; and as provider of milk for the child's needs. As such, and as has been discussed by theorists such as Mary Douglas, it is the problematic integrity—the permeability—of the mother's (and the woman's) body that is at issue: the body that Butler positions as both lost and in terms of a return is yet never the woman's but is always and only at the service of others, a concept that has been expressed (pun very much intended) as 'the leaky female'.

In relating such a construction of motherhood and the female body to early modern witchcraft narratives, this crossover and mutual reliance between the body of the mother and the body of the child appears to be exactly what is at issue, particularly if we remember Boyer and Nissenbaum's claim that Rebecca Nurse and her sisters were targeted, in part at least, because of the accusations against their mother many years before: when it comes to witchcraft, everyone retains that mother-child relationship, no matter their age at the time of such panics. And it is the leakiness of the female-mother body, and the uncanny relationship between witch and mother, that allows such accusations to be made: the penetration (spiritual and/or physical) of the devil, sometimes producing demonic offspring; sending out one's 'shape' in order to afflict others, either in a facsimile of the witch's body or in the body of an animal; allowing demonic imps to suck, sometimes from the breast but often from extra 'teats' on the woman's body, frequently found between the legs; and baptising one's own child as a child of the Devil in a symbolic rebirth.<sup>15</sup> In addition, one must also consider the problematic integrity of not just the accused but the afflicted female body: problematic in that it must be considered discrete in order to be considered afflicted, yet also permeable in its very capacity for affliction, an activity that derives from the body or spirit of another who is always situated outside one's own body but who refuses to stay in her/his place.

In this seventeenth-century positioning of the body of the witch as, somehow, abnormal, recourse had to made to a female body that was considered as known, stable, and identifiably 'normal' in order for the witch to be differentiated: the witch's observed and judged abnormalities were focused on what she could or could not physically achieve and the allegedly supernatural means by which she might achieve the unachievable; a view on her bodily 'excrescences' and determination of their abnormality;

and a policing of her sexuality and any resultant child of what was judged as deviant congress. And in considering the witch as a mother, it is often claimed to be motherhood that is, by various means, uncanny: again, abnormal in contrast to an assumed, desired, and expected norm. For example, the witch will suckle the familiar rather than a child and may well do so when she is past childbearing age; she will harm or kill the child rather than nurture it; and she may eat the child or use its blood or body in potions rather than giving of her own body for its care. In each instance, the witch mother's behaviour overturns what is expected, necessitating an assumed correctness of behaviour to be understood in order for it to be subverted. In a perhaps unexpected twist, one of the few instances of such magic in Salem was Mary Sibley's countermagic, when she collected the urine of the afflicted girls in order to make a 'witch-cake' to determine who afflicted them, with the girls' urine standing in for their bodies. As such, Sibley dabbled in witchcraft herself (for which she was publicly chastised by Samuel Parris); she stood *in loco parentis* to the afflicted girls, usurping the rightful place of the mother; and she used their urine for witchcraft, thereby disturbing their status as afflicted innocents from the outset, with the permeability of their bodies responsible for perhaps the only recorded instance of genuinely attempted witchcraft in the entire trials.<sup>16</sup>

Diane Purkiss considers such claims to the permeability of the bodies of mother and child in her chapter, 'No limit: the body of the witch'. For example, she notes:

In order to be a Cartesian subject, culture insists, the infant must acknowledge its own separation from the maternal; at the same time, separation is always a precarious achievement, and the adult retains a trace of fear at being re-engulfed by the endless body of the fantasy mother.<sup>17</sup>

How might such a claim comment on how the Salem trials played out? As we have seen, even 'children' who were themselves married or mothers were re-engulfed by the mother (either with or, more usually, without intent) when their own arrests were made primarily to accuse and condemn those mothers, while young people still living with their parents were leveraged to bring about those parents' downfall while confirming the abnormality of that parent-child relationship through the confirmation of witchcraft in both. Therefore, the 'leakiness' of the mother's body of which the child always remains a part is also true of the child's body:

neither can, quite, separate itself from the other, especially where claims to witchcraft are involved. As such, the implications of accusations against whole families in the Salem witch trials, and therefore accusations against children in and of themselves, are normalised: if the mother is guilty, then the child—being of her body and the mother being of the child's—must be guilty too.

### WITCH CHILD, WITCH FAMILY

But why were mothers and their children (of all ages) such targets during the Salem witch trials in particular? That is to say, not as a difference from European witch trials where such links were also frequently made, but rather to question how gendered constructions of witchcraft troubled the power status of women and children in New England Puritan society, positioning them as a threat to male dominance but still subject to the patriarchal auspices of the Devil and ultimately vulnerable to accusation due to their subservient social status.

In assigning the 'leaky' body to women, one might argue that the leakiness of both the family body and the body of the child is inevitable. After all, if we posit the *woman's* body as leaky primarily due to her *ability* to be a mother and all that the role physically entails, the body of the *mother* is necessarily the fulfilment of this promise, with even pre-motherhood examples such as menstrual periods and male phallic penetration necessary to recreate the female body as mother. The body of the child must also therefore be implicated in such a claim to problematic boundaries, in that it is formed of the father and mother; it is made inside and by the body of the mother; it must be cut away from the mother at birth, leaving the umbilical cord and placenta behind, each of which is both and neither mother and/nor child; and it must be fed from the mother's body in order to survive. The sex of the child is less important than that of its mother until it reaches an adulthood in which the cycle begins again, thereby further problematising who we can construct as child and why.

This family leakiness is replicated and enhanced in narratives of the witch families of Essex County. Witchcraft is frequently assumed to be hereditary, passed on from mother to child, even in any *suspicion* of the mother as a witch as was the case with Rebecca Nurse and her sisters, in a similar way to the assumption that any strong family trait—good or bad—would be passed on. As Cotton Mather claimed in 1699: 'don't you know, that your children, are the children of death, and the children of hell, and

the children of wrath, by nature: and that from you, this nature is derived and conveyed to them!’<sup>18</sup> In the hereditary nature of witchcraft, one can see the assumption that a witch was something you were as well as something you did; much like attempts to categorise homosexuality (another assumed aberrance in its time) in the late-nineteenth century. In both cases, however, heredity did not make the accused any less culpable in the eyes of the law. In addition to heredity, witchcraft is also frequently assumed to be drunk in from the mother’s breast, but in an inversion in that the mother is not passing on health and strength but evil and the desire, capacity, and destiny to repeat the inversion, especially in female children. As Purkiss claims (although in reference to the mother replaced by the witch rather than the mother as a witch): ‘Food has significance for women because it is a means of nourishing, sustaining and protecting—and therefore controlling—the bodies into which it is instilled. The witch’s food reverses this positive charge; instead of sustaining, it destroys.’<sup>19</sup> She further notes: ‘Colostrum, the rich creamy pre-milk made during pregnancy was taboo. Significantly, it was known as witch’s milk.’<sup>20</sup> As such, the leakiness of the witch family is not just predicated on a passive trait, passed on—like a genetic disorder—without the will or intent of the carrier; but on the blurring of boundaries between mother and child bodies post-birth, in which the mother continues to give of her body to the child.

And beyond the leakiness of the mother-child body lay further opportunities for a conversion that we might argue either negates the hereditary taint of witchcraft or enhances it: the witch mother would often frequently ‘make’ the child into a witch, as claimed in the examinations of Dorothy and Abigail Faulkner, who stated not only that their mother, Abigail Faulkner Sr., had ‘apared and mayd them witches’, but that she had also usurped the place of other children’s mothers, making Martha Tyler, Johanna Tyler, Sarah Wilson, and the adult Joseph Draper into witches at the same time.<sup>21</sup> The Andover witch mother would often baptise the children in a river or pond, inverting a Puritan church baptism in which the child would be dedicated to God rather than the devil, with the witch-mother claiming the patriarchal roles of God, Satan, and man for herself, thereby disturbing the social body as well as the family body. Examples of this were seen in many of the Essex County children’s confessions; although the elder Carrier brothers, Richard and Andrew, confessed to having been baptised by the devil himself rather than their mother, their little sister Sarah claimed that ‘her mother baptized her [...] and her

mother said when she baptized her, thou are mine for ever and ever amen' as did her brother, Thomas, inverting the Christian prayer and the role of the minister, in claiming such language for women.<sup>22</sup> And language was key to the child's conversion in other ways: the witch mother would have the child write in the devil's book, replicating the mother's role in educating the child but usurping the man's place as the holder of written language and stealing said language for the traditionally silent women and children. Again, Martha Carrier was accused here, with her youngest son, Thomas, claiming that 'his mother appeared to him & brought him a book & bid him Sett his hand to it telling him it would doe him good if he did Soe & yt She would tear him in peices if he would not'.<sup>23</sup> Such an education is not just of and by the book, but serves as a reminder to the male child of the continuing power of the mother both in his life and over his body.

It is not the case that every mother-child witchcraft accusation in Salem conformed to these patterns, however, with children also confessing to being made into witches by the devil rather than the mother, as was the case with the elder Carrier boys. Cotton Mather also argued that many children resisted the power of the witch mother in rejecting their dedication to the devil. In his *Memorable Providences*, he lamented:

It would break an heart of Stone, to have seen, what I have lately seen; Even poor Children of several Ages, even from seven to twenty, more or less, *Confessing* their Familiarity with Devils; but at the same time, in Doleful bitter Lamentations, that made a little Pourtraiture of *Hell* it self, Expostulating with their execrable Parents, for *Devoting* them to the Devil in their Infancy, and so *Entailing* of Devilism upon them!<sup>24</sup>

As such, Mather problematises the claims of heredity, with children made into witches at a later point, crucially against their will, and thus able to protest at such horrific treatment. Further, the existence of a multiplicity in such methods is somewhat contradictory: after all, if witchcraft is genetic or passed on through breast milk, surely that would render rebaptism and the signing of the devil's book as redundant. Yet it might also be read that such methods were supplementary: that the child was already a witch but that these ceremonies—like baptism itself—served as a public dedication to the chosen deity and also as a token of the mother's own dedication, in that she would sacrifice the child to the devil or bind him/her as the devil's apprentice, much as the bound girls had been sent out to



other families. As such, these supplementary child witch activities served to blur the family boundaries still further, with the devil invited in as kin.

Such an inversion of the mother-daughter relationship, even within claims to witchcraft, suggests another reading of the relationship between witch child and witch mother in Salem: that of the failure of the woman as mother and the resultant impact on her passive child. Renner argues: 'Possessed child narratives [...] are parables about how failed parenting allows children to become vulnerable to dangerous influences.'<sup>25</sup> Similarly, although in discussing the musical *Matilda* rather than witch children, Rose claims: 'Failed mothers are everywhere—overinvested, neglectful, dead'.<sup>26</sup> In both of these cases, while neither is specifically discussing the events in Salem, the mother is positioned as at fault in any societally assumed aberrance of the child; as in the case of Dorcas/Dorothy, the narrative assumes that the child cannot come to witchcraft herself but must be inducted or otherwise influenced by an adult, most frequently the witch mother, with even the bound girls' status as 'evil' sometimes predicated on the absence of their mothers. Rose later adds to her critique of *Matilda*: 'It's clear that to be seen by a mother is a mixed blessing either way. Too much and you will be a monster. Not enough and the chances are you will not enter a fully human world.' Such a claim might also be made against Salem's witch mothers, in that their influence is frequently positioned as transforming their previously innocent children into witches on those occasions when they were not born as such. But it is also interesting to deliberately misread Rose's claim to 'by a mother' to read '*as* a mother'; not because Rose means this, but because it also gives a view of the gaze that is applied *to* the witch mother by society, one that always renders her as other and frequently as failure.

### CHILDREN AND FAMILIARS: AN UNCANNY DOUBLING

One further way in which children were implicated in the witchcraft of their families in Salem was through a court focus on supernatural methods of hurting others; for in addition to the much cited and debated sending out of a spectral 'shape', many accusations and confessions centred around claims to the witch's familiar. During Lawson's returning sermon to the already shaken Salem Villagers on March 20, 1692, the afflicted girls began to see such familiars, even in church: 'In Sermon time when Goodw C was present in the Meeting house Ab. W. called out, Look where Goodw. C sits on the Beam suckling her Yellow bird betwixt her fingers!

Anne Putman another Girl afflicted said there was a Yellow-bird sat on my hat'.<sup>27</sup> Accused children also confessed to having familiars, such as Dorothy/Dorcas Good's 'little Snake' and her accusation that her mother had three birds. And adult witnesses testified to visions of women turning into animals, and vice versa: William Brown, for example, claimed that Susannah Martin afflicted his wife, Elizabeth, 'as birds peking her Legs or priking her with the mosion of thayr wings'.<sup>28</sup> Such familiars were assumed to be more than pets or visions, but were demons that could be sent out by the witch to do her bidding; and as with Dorcas/Dorothy, the witch was said to suckle the witch from a teat somewhere on her body.

As such, it might be argued that, as older women frequently stood *in loco parentis* to children whose families they were attempting to harm—with the child therefore figured as valuable primarily to its parents rather than itself—the familiar often took the place of the child at the mother's breast, albeit that she was feeding it blood rather than milk and not always from her breast but from an unnatural excrescence that stood in place of the naturalised nipple.<sup>29</sup> The mother was therefore rejecting her role within the family and as a biological mother in order to nurture demons while neglecting her own children, simultaneously replaying and inverting that role: she does not reject motherhood as completely as does Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, who would have 'plucked my nipple from his boneless gums/And dashed the brains out' in order to renounce her femininity, but rather retains the performative trappings of motherhood even while rejecting her own child to replace it with a devilish substitute, one that might represent a fear of the changeling child.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, as already discussed albeit in a different context, it might be argued that the witch mother also recreates the child as her own familiar or the devil's via the second baptism so common in Andover children's confessions. As Purkiss claims: 'All these names [given to familiars] are alike in figuring the familiar as small, and all have a certain affectionate sound, connoting the relations between master and servant, owner and pet, parent and child. Some at least are blatant baby names.'<sup>31</sup> Often taking place in Five Mile pond, as confessed by William Barker Jr. among others, the mother or usurping mother-figure—either alone or with the devil—would re-enact the child's birth through stripping or otherwise sending the child naked into the pool to re-emerge dedicated to the devil and bound to do his works. As such, in these confessions, the child also replicated the status of the afflicted bound girls, positioned not only as an apprentice to the devil in his works but also as a familiar in that the devil could thereafter

send the child out to harm others as witches sent their shapes and familiars: Stephen Johnson Jr., for example, confessed to harming Martha Sprague by squeezing his hands together after being dunked in the Shaw Shin river.<sup>32</sup> As such, the parents—both mother and father—of the accused children, were in constant flux: the mother played the role of the God-like father; the devil stood in for the father and apprentice's master; and both parents relegated and promoted the still-subservient child to the status of familiar, whereby s/he gained the power to cause harm via supernatural means, while still acting solely on the witch-devil parents' behalf.

These child witches, as do their mothers, further disturb the natural and social order of things in that some, such as Dorothy/Dorcas Good, claimed to have and suckle familiars themselves. While this was not a common claim in the Salem trials, with the apparition of women and devils in the shape of animals far more common, such claims position the children as both copying their mothers and usurping their role, becoming the witch mother in their turn, thereby demonstrating the aberrant behaviour of the witch in overturning the social order while still acting as the socially sanctioned child reflection of the more traditional mother-role in the Puritan family unit. The assignation of a familiar to a child in Salem is perhaps more common in fiction than in history: in Katherine Howe's *The Daughters of Temperance Hobbs*, for example, modern-day witch and Salem descendant Connie's familiar dies; it is replaced by her twin baby daughters, each of whom now has their own familiars.<sup>33</sup> In this case, Connie's daughters are both familiars and replacement familiars, inverting the witch trope of the familiar replacing the child, while the newborn children both echo and replace the mother with newborn familiars of their own. In the wider world of witch-fiction, each of the child characters in the *Harry Potter* series has its own 'pet', but one that replicates the witch-familiar in that it acts on its owner's behalf: Harry's owl, Hedwig, sends and receives messages at his request; Ron's rat, Scabbers, is figured as 'useless' because he does nothing, with the assumption that he should do something embedded in this complaint (and, it turns out, he does nothing because he is not really a rat or a familiar at all but an *animagus*, a man transformed into an animal); and Hermione's cat, Crookshanks, lives up to his crooked name by rarely acting on Hermione's behalf but instead attempting to help Sirius Black, Harry's godfather and *animagus*, thereby positioning Crookshanks as a familiar working on behalf of another quasi-familiar. And in Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, every child and adult have a *daemon*, a manifestation of their spirit in the shape of an animal, but

one that has the ability to change in a child but becomes set into a final form for adults. While this 'familiar' can be sent to do the child's (and the adults') bidding, any separation causes immense physical and emotional pain, interestingly with the exception of Pullman's witches, who can send their *daemons* out to help or to harm with no negative impact on themselves. As such, the child's familiar may be uncommon in history but has largely been naturalised in fiction.

To return to Salem, a further method of torturing the unsuspecting was through the use of poppets. Witches were both accused of and confessed to using crudely made dolls, which they pricked with pins in order to afflict their enemies. Ann Foster and her daughter Mary Lacey Sr., for example, confessed to causing *maleficium* with poppets, with a July 20 search of their home turning up 'rag and quill bundles that looked suspiciously like poppets'.<sup>34</sup> And Abigail Hobbs, despite denying that she suckled familiars (though supernatural 'dogs and many creatures' did appear to her), confessed that the devil had brought her 'images [...] in wood' of Ann Putnam Jr., Mercy Lewis, and Abigail Williams, and 'gave her thorns, and bid her prick them into those images'.<sup>35</sup> Like familiars, these poppets disturbed the social order of motherhood, with mothers playing with dolls, albeit with evil intent; mothers and children making and caring for these childlike diminutive figures; and both apparently causing pain to these quasi-child figures in order to harm others. On occasions, however, the witch mother cut out the middleman and used her own child as poppet. Hite reports:

[Sarah Wardwell's] description of her method of hurting [Martha] Sprague is profoundly disturbing. She stated that she "suddenly caught up her child in her arms and wished Sprague might be afflicted and little after said she squeezed the child with an intention that the persons should be afflicted". In effect, Sarah Wardwell confessed that she used her own child as a weapon to harm Martha Sprague and some of the others, just as earlier confessors claimed to have used poppets. Such an act, if carried out, could not have failed to cause pain to the child.<sup>36</sup>

While Hite doubts the veracity of Sarah Wardwell's confession, he still makes the connections between poppets and children in her confessed intent of using her child as a means to harm others. Like the witch-familiar, the child could both act as and replace the poppet, much as the poppet would displace and replace the witch's child.

## THE AFFLICTED FAMILY

While so far this analysis has focused on the leakiness of the witch family—despite such leakiness being predicated on the biologically and socially ordered family, as opposed to the blurred boundaries of the more frequently occurring blended Salem Puritan family—that is not to say that other families were not subject to an uncannily similar leakiness: in particular, some of the afflicted families. After all, it is impossible to talk about the afflicted children without talking about their families too: either they are outside the biological family structure with missing parents and with positions in others' families, as in the case of the bound girls; or they are far too close. For example, the two Ann Putnams, Sr. and Jr., overlap in more than name, with the daughter first afflicted, followed by the mother, and with Starkey's accusation that Ann Jr. had 'sucked in with her mother's milk all the slanders of the neighborhood' echoing the witch passing witchcraft into her child while she simultaneously passed affliction onto her mother, thus disturbing the familial order.<sup>37</sup> Ann Jr. problematically becomes her mother's familiar, acting for her mother, playing out her mother's politics, and avenging her grief at losing other babies under such a claim. Children such as Ann Jr. have been claimed in histories as willing or unknowing tools of their adult family, weaponised against other families to gain social, political, and/or religious dominance; and these children are therefore implicated in their families' assumed wrongdoings.

As with the leakiness of the accused families, these kinds of relations were confined primarily to blood family: despite the importance of the bound girls in the afflicted group and the leakiness of the Puritan Massachusetts Bay family as discussed earlier, accusations of witchcraft—on both sides of the divide—largely work to restore the nuclear family that always lies behind any attempt to construe the extended family *as* extended or as otherwise leaky. Yet the bound girls still have their place: in disturbing the boundaries of the normative biological family unit, they create something new: after all, the afflicted girls problematise the blood-status of the leaky family still further in their very status as 'afflicted' and the assumption of them as a group, with a single intent and a single voice. As such, and as female, they have been positioned in history as a pseudo-family, particularly through the claim to a 'sorority' in later narratives, in which the all-female family is constructed as both outside of and inside the Puritan family structure: aberrant as all-female, but situated within the Parris household, as if bred from inside the Puritan and patriarchal but

also domestic structure. Such claims to the female afflicted family have been leveraged to show the guilt of the afflicted girls in their usurpation of the proper biological family.

Salem's afflicted girls can also be read as leaky within their own family structures, as with the accused, in that they primarily take in rather than give out: they are possessed by others; they are bitten and strangled; and their bodies are controlled by witches, such as in Abigail Williams' attempts to throw herself in the fire under the direction of Rebecca Nurse's shape, as narrated by Lawson. The bodies of the afflicted children are therefore infiltrated constantly, just as the bodies of the accused are invaded by their witch parents and by the devil. However, there are two significant differences between accused and afflicted: the first is that such diabolic infiltration of the afflicted—the Putnams aside—rarely takes place within the family but comes from outside, in a disturbance of the defences of the family unit. And, secondly, in the narration of their experiences this infiltration of the afflicted is pathologised, no matter that neither the afflicted *nor* the accused requested such admission. Blurring the boundary between family bodies is therefore naturalised, while intra-family penetration is, quite literally, demonised. The accused children are also accused rather than afflicted because they penetrate others—such penetration taking the form of biting, sending their shape to torment others, and transforming into animals to torment the innocent—thereby disturbing the assumed or ideal family structure in which this only moves in one direction, from parent to child and not from child to either adult or other child, and because they are penetrating outside of the discrete family structure.

The difference between innocent victim and accused witch, then, is frequently grounded in family: both in the naturalisation of the witch family's blurred bodies—even while they are accused of multiple inversions of the rites of motherhood—and the aberrance of body-boundary fluidity outside of the biological and socially sanctioned family structure. Yet there may be something here, too, about the church-led oppression of sex outside of marriage; for once the positions of accusers and accused were reversed, with the innocence of the witches assumed and the resultant guilt of the afflicted both implied and claimed, this new guilt was frequently anchored in the later marital state of each, according to retrospective narratives: a majority of the accused went on to marry and have children, replicating the rightful family structure, with even the Barker cousins' marriage pointed out as an anomaly that could be explained away by their joint witch-past by Hite. Of course, in order to effect this reversal,

all hint of a hereditary witch ‘taint’ in such family structures or in the mother’s milk is swept neatly under the carpet in such narratives. By contrast, the post-trial assumed guilt of the afflicted was both shown by their lack of ability to replicate the desired family structure, as with Ann Putnam Jr.’s ‘failure’ to marry, or the excess or abnormality of how they did it: prostitution or babies outside marriage. As Baker says of Susannah Sheldon: ‘in 1694, the court identified her as “a person of evil fame”’, while ‘Mercy Lewis bore a bastard in 1695, though she later married. Mercy Short was excommunicated from the Boston church for adultery, and Sarah Churchwell and her husband were fined for premarital fornication’.<sup>38</sup> Such narratives position these aberrant family structures as both proof of guilt and punishment for it. Explanations for the abnormality of the afflicted girl are predicated on the sexualisation not of children but of those still largely positioned in historical narratives in terms of that status as child, even when that phase has passed beyond its designation as such by any narrative. The afflicted cannot ever escape their status as children and their status as pathologised based on their very approach to family, even after the trials are long since concluded.

### RESETTLING THE WITCH FAMILY

One further family regrouping that has yet to be accounted for is one that was wholly involuntary on the part of the family members: that of the redistribution of children in the event of their witch parents’ incarceration or death. While such consideration takes us away from the by-now familiar groupings of afflicted and accused (no matter the leakiness between them), this group of children are, perhaps, the most overlooked in all the histories of Salem. How many such children there were cannot be known; but both their fate and their social position are worth considering.

The best-known case—in that the court’s deliberations and decisions are still available for analysis—is regarding the family of Samuel and Sarah Hooper Wardwell. According to the records, the selectmen of Andover petitioned the court on September 26, 1692, to help with the ‘severall small children’ who had been left ‘vncapable of provideing for themselves, and are now in a suffering condition’ on the arrest of both of their parents and the execution of their father.<sup>39</sup> This petition of John Abbott and John Aslaabee on behalf of the town asked for both advice and the release of confiscated funds for their care and was resolved—at least in part—the next day when general sessions held in Ipswich decided that they should

place out 'so many or all of Said Children into good and honest ffamilies'.<sup>40</sup> In their return on September 28, the selectmen confirmed:

Samuel Wardwell [Jr.] we placed with John Ballard his uncle for one year, William we placed with Corpl Saml ffrie till he come to be of ye age of one and twenty years; sd ffrie to learne him ye trade of a weaver. Eliakim we placed to Daniel Poor till he was twenty-one years of age & Elizabeth we placed with John Stevens till eighteen years of age.<sup>41</sup>

This report speaks to an ongoing leakiness in Salem's family structures. One way it does so is in the designation of a time period during which the children were to remain with their host families: until the age of 21 for the boys and until 18 for the only daughter, Elizabeth. This raises even more doubts about who might (or might not) be designated as a child in that it splits what one might assume as the age of adulthood by sex, with girls reaching an assumed majority three full years before their brothers. And, as with Norton's designation of 'youth' reaching until age 25, this also troubles my assumption that childhood ended at 18 at the very latest, potentially adding several more 'boys' to the lists of accused and accusers.

In terms of family, this case also troubles the already troubled Salem family status as, without parents, the Wardwell family can no longer exist: ties of the fraternity are not enough to keep the children together and they are each sent to join new families by those temporarily acting *in loco parentis*, at least until they reach this problematically divided adulthood, while their infant sister Rebecca remains in prison with her mother.<sup>42</sup> It also, however, raises questions regarding the extent that the 'taint' of witchcraft, either by heredity or by the intent of the witch parent, was believed in Salem. In the space of a single day, the selectmen had arranged for four different families to take in these children of two accused and convicted witches (although, of course, the agreements may have been in place before the selectmen submitted their plea to the court); although none of the children had been accused of witchcraft, according to extant records, such a move may still have been deemed incredibly risky if there was any genuine belief at all in witchcraft among the said families; particularly when, as Schiff points out: 'The eldest ended up with his uncle, John Ballard, whose brother had accused Wardwell and conducted him to jail'.<sup>43</sup> As such, the leaky witch family of Essex County exists beyond the witch trials, with the reformation of both witch and non-witch families necessary in the trials' wake.



Of course, the Wardwell family was not the only Salem-impacted family to have been forced to redistribute their children or, if executed or remaining in prison, have them redistributed during or in the wake of the trials. Many Andover children, including Stephen and Abigail Johnson, the younger Carrier children, and John Sadie were bailed out by those claiming either more distant kinship than a biological parent or no kinship at all, but acting *in loco parentis* if only temporarily. John Proctor's large family was also a case in point: with his third wife, Elizabeth, also arrested and sentenced to hang, Proctor never met his youngest child, who was born on January 27 after his father's execution and lived the first few months of his life in prison until Elizabeth was released in May 1693. Among their five older children, the two eldest, William and Sarah, had also been arrested on suspicion of witchcraft; Elisha had died in 1688 at only a year old; but the remaining two children—seven-year-old Samuel and three-year-old Abigail—and any of the 11 step-children still living in the family were left at first to the tender clutches of their parents' accuser and maid-servant, Mary Warren, until her own arrest and imprisonment. As Calef claims in his *More Wonders of the Invisible World*:

John Proctor and his Wife being in Prison, the Sheriff came to his House and seized all the Goods, Provisions, and Cattle that he could come at, and sold some of the Cattle at half price, and killed others, and put them up for the West-Indies; threw out the Beer out of a Barrel, and carried away the Barrel; emptied a Pot of Broath, and took away the Pot, and left nothing in the House for the support of the Children.<sup>44</sup>

Even on their mother's release, times were almost impossible for the Proctor family as their estates had been seized and Elizabeth was considered dead in the eyes of the law due to her conviction and death sentence, even though her pregnancy had prevented it being carried out. As such, she and her children continued to be impacted long after their father's death, with the attainder against her not removed until 1703 and payments in restitution to Elizabeth and her children not made until 1712, when her children were grown and sometimes married.

Calef also records the impact of such financially punitive measures on the siblings of Margaret Jacobs, whose father ran away to escape arrest and whose mother—'a Woman Crazy in her Senses and had been so several Years'—was arrested after the incarceration of Margaret and her grandfather, George Jacobs, Sr.:

[T]here were in the house only four small Children, and one of them suck'd. her Eldest Daughter being in Prison; the Officer perswaded her out of the House, to go along with him, telling her she should speedily return, the Children ran a great way after her crying. [...] the Neighbours of pitty took care of the Children to preserve them from perishing.<sup>45</sup>

Upham also notes the case of Edward and Sarah Bishop who were imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft: 'A family of twelve children was left without any to direct or care for them, and the product of the farm for that year wholly cut off'.<sup>46</sup> While each of these cases serves to highlight the significance of another group of Salem's children who are frequently overlooked by history, they also serve to show that the slippery nature of the family unit was felt in many and various ways, most frequently by those children who were left behind with little or nothing on which to survive, and whose lives would thereafter be linked—temporarily or permanently—with families other than their own, thereby perpetuating the leaky family in Essex County beyond the period of the trials.

## NOTES

1. See Chap. 1 for details of analyses on New England childhood.
2. C. John Sommerville (1992) *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press).
3. Anna French, ed. (2020) *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction* (Oxon and New York: Routledge).
4. Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p. 145.
5. Hite, p. 89.
6. Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, p. 10.
7. Morgan, pp. 75–76.
8. Morgan, p. 78.
9. Richard Weisman (1984) *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), p. 82.
10. Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p. 149.
11. Freud's construct of the uncanny is, indeed, one that revolves around the home, with the German word 'unheimlich' the opposite of 'heimlich' ['homely']. Freud, S. (1919). The 'Uncanny'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, pp. 217–256.
12. Deborah Willis, (1995) *Malevolent Nurture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 6.
13. Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, p. 69.

14. Judith Butler (1993) *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge), p. 25.
15. Such problematisation of the woman's body in relation to witchcraft continues even now. On the day of writing, January 27, 2020, President Trump's spiritual advisor, Paula White, called for 'all Satanic pregnancies to miscarry right now'; Satanic in the sense of belonging to mothers who do not support Trump. Both women and children continue to be condemned and have their bodies appropriated for political purposes in terms of witchcraft.
16. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials*, pp. 18, 59.
17. Purkiss, p. 120.
18. Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, p. 14.
19. Purkiss, p. 108.
20. Purkiss, p. 131.
21. Rosenthal et al., p. 660.
22. Rosenthal et al., p. 541.
23. Rosenthal et al., p. 540. Mary Toothaker, in contrast, tried to protect her daughter, Margaret, by blaming her husband for reading with the child and claiming that she was unsure if she had signed the devil's book, although she named many others, including her sister and nephew, who did. Rosenthal et al., p. 492.
24. Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences*.
25. Renner, p. 95.
26. Jacqueline Rose (2014) 'Mothers', *London Review of Books*, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n12/jacqueline-rose/mothers> [accessed 31 March 2020].
27. Lawson in Burr, p. 154.
28. Rosenthal et al., p. 257.
29. It is worth noting that physical examinations also revealed accused men to have teats for sucking familiars: George Jacobs Sr. was said to have three teats on his body, although George Burroughs had none. Rosenthal et al., p. 517.
30. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, p. 46.
31. Purkiss, p. 135.
32. Rosenthal et al., p. 574.
33. Howe (2019) *The Daughters of Temperance Hobbs* (New York: Henry Holt and Company).
34. Schiff, p. 243.
35. Rosenthal et al., p. 198.
36. Hite, p. 144.
37. Starkey, p. 207.
38. Baker, p. 234.
39. Rosenthal et al., p. 674.
40. Rosenthal et al., p. 675.

41. Rosenthal et al., p. 676.
42. Hite, p. 151.
43. Schiff, p. 307.
44. Calef in Burr, p. 361.
45. Calef in Burr, p. 371.
46. Upham, p. 384n.



## CHAPTER 6

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# The Shaming of Abigail Hobbs

Trying to find the correct place for a chapter on Abigail Hobbs has not been easy. She does not belong with the afflicted girls, although she claimed affliction. She was accused of and confessed to witchcraft, yet she does not fit into any pattern of the accused child. And although her parents were accused along with her, she does not fit within the family chapter either. At each turn, she confounds expectations. Yet of all the children involved in the various patterns of witchcraft accusations in Essex County, Topsfield's Abigail Hobbs is perhaps most deserving of a chapter to herself *because* she refuses to fit neatly into the binaries of afflicted and accused; because she was one of only six known children brought to trial; and because she was the only child sentenced to death, no matter that the sentence was not carried out. Further, from a reading of the court records, this 14 (or 12) year old girl is one of the most controversial and interesting figures of the trials, with her testimony second only to Tituba's explosive confession in her outrageous accusations as one of the afflicted girls and in her own confessions—corroborated by friends, neighbours, and her family—to her dealings with the devil and the murder of several unnamed children. Unlike the guilt/innocence binary that characterises representations of Dorcas/Dorothy in the histories, Abigail was guilty in the narratives of Salem from the start. During her examination on 19 April 1692, Abigail claimed, under questioning from Corwin: 'I have been very wicked. I hope I shall be better, if God will help me'; yet given the raft of witchcraft accusations she was to make against others and the confessions

to her own misdeeds, such a claim appears disingenuous at best.<sup>1</sup> Given the extensive extant records on Abigail, it would be misleading to claim her as one of Salem's absent children; rather, I am discussing her here to consider how she disturbs any claimed pattern to Salem's afflicted or accused children.

### BEFORE THE TRIALS

According to those histories that consider her in any detail, Abigail Hobbs first entered the records while living in Falmouth in 1688, although there is no known record of her family living there according to extensive work carried out by Norton, who hypothesises that Abigail may have been a servant in Maine, but that it is far more likely that her family resided there for some years. Abigail's mother, Avis, died some time before the witchcraft crisis, at which point her father, William, was married to new wife Deliverance, now the stepmother of Abigail and her siblings; none of whom feature in the trials, despite the later arrests of both William and Deliverance, and many of whom, Norton speculates, may have died before the move to Topsfield given that 'only Abigail and one of her brothers can subsequently be traced in the extensive public records of Essex County'.<sup>2</sup>

If one were to believe the many and various testimonies against her, as well as her own confessions, Abigail's career as a witch began many years before Betty Parris and Abigail Williams first began complaining of strange pains in January 1692. Priscilla Chubb, age 31 and the only witness against Abigail who is not positioned as a 'child' in any of the narratives, swore that 'sum time the last winter' the accused had confessed that 'she had seen the divell and had made a covenant or bargain with him'.<sup>3</sup> Margaret Knight, age 18, told of Abigail's 'baptism' of her stepmother, Deliverance Hobbs, 'about a year agoe'.<sup>4</sup> And 17-year-old Lydia Nichols testified that Abigail 'told me she had sold her selfe boddy and soul to ye old boy' some 'yeare & halfe ago'.<sup>5</sup> While many of Salem's witchcraft allegations related to instances of *maleficium* that were said to take place prior to the immediate period of accusation and trial, Abigail's case was different in that she was primarily accused of covenanting rather than *maleficium*, although she was also accused by many of the afflicted girls—Ann Putnam Jr., Mary Walcott, and Mercy Lewis among them—of afflicting them in the usual manner. As such, none of the historical accusations were based on any personal sense of wrongdoing; yet neither did it appear that any of these accusations were made at the time they had allegedly occurred as, unlike

other accused witches such as Bridget Bishop (who was earlier accused of bewitching her first husband to death), there is no record of Abigail having been accused of witchcraft in any of her previous hometowns.

Abigail's case was also unusual in that she was the first child from outside of Salem to be accused. She was living at the time in Topsfield, some five miles north of Salem Village, but had also lived in Casco, Maine, some years previously. The most detailed portrait of Hobbs' time in Casco comes from Norton, whose examination of the Salem panic in light of King William's War, King Philip's War, and the ongoing Indian attacks on the fringes of Essex County, necessarily includes Abigail's history on this Indian frontier, one that was subject to a Wabanaki assault in September 1689 prior to her move to Topsfield. Norton focuses on Abigail's life in Casco at some length, and on her relationships there with afflicted girl Mercy Lewis and prior Salem minister, George Burroughs, who she went on to accuse and who was subsequently hanged on the evidence of many accusers, both the afflicted girls and adults.<sup>6</sup>

Of Abigail, Norton says:

Abigail Hobbs' confession of April 19, coupled with Ann Jr.'s spectral encounter with George Burroughs on the evening of April 20, transformed the witchcraft crisis from a serious but not wholly unprecedented set of incidents into the extraordinary event that played out over the next six months.<sup>7</sup>

Far from the 'insignificant' evidence offered by Dorcas/Dorothy Good, Abigail's evidence is therefore positioned as changing the course of the trials; although, as with Ray's comments regarding Dorcas/Dorothy, any significance of Abigail's evidence was not in the effect it had on her own life but on that of others. Repeatedly, and as previously discussed, Salem's children are positioned in such narratives as important only in how they impact on adult lives; and this is borne out in other historians' lack of commentary on Abigail. In her trial and conviction, with Cotton Mather claiming that the graves of all convicted witches from the day of her conviction had already been dug before the reprieve came, her story upsets the dominant narrative that children were not executed in Salem. So why has relatively little been said about her case compared to Dorcas/Dorothy and the afflicted girls?

## ABIGAIL AS WITCH

Abigail Hobbs enters the court records on Monday April 18, 1692, when a warrant was issued for her arrest along with Giles Corey, Mary Warren, and Bridget Bishop; she was therefore among the first wave of those arrested and was the second child, after Dorcas/Dorothy Good.<sup>8</sup> Hobbs was accused of ‘sundry acts of Witchcraft [...] vpon the Bodys of. Ann Putnam, Marcy lewis, and Abigl Williams and Mary Walcot & Eliz. Hubert of Salem Village’; at this still-early stage of the trials, many of Sebal’d’s named afflicted girls were still the most comment complainants.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Dorcas/Dorothy just a short time before, whose only admission of culpability was in receiving a familiar from her mother—she did not confess to afflicting anyone according to extant records—Abigail was ready to tell Hathorne and Corwin anything they wished to know about her time as a witch, her pact with the devil, and the details of how she had harmed others.

Abigail’s first court appearance, on April 19, caused a sensation second only to that of Tituba. Examined by judges Hathorne and Corwin, with the examination recorded in question and answer format—in common with many early examinations but few of children—Abigail’s first recorded response was: ‘I will speak the truth’; thus, questions are raised about Abigail’s testimony from the outset and, further, about the testimonies of all Salem’s accused and afflicted children. Did Abigail speak the truth, as she understood it, or was she foresworn from the outset? Further, at the age of either 12 or 14, depending on which record we believe, was she capable of understanding the magnitude of what she was confessing, the possible consequences of what she was saying, or even the meaning of this adult court? While these questions are, of course, relevant to all the confessing accused and their child accusers, the extent and seriousness of Abigail’s confessions makes such questions of paramount importance.

Discussing child witch cases in early modern Europe, Brian Levack comments on children in court:

The testimony of children in any trial is of course always suspect, simply because children are highly suggestible and because they have difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from reality. They are also capable of giving false testimony to gain revenge on those who have disciplined them. All of this was well known in the judicial literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, [...] many legal authorities in the early modern period placed the crime of witchcraft in a special category to permit such judicial latitude [as] an excepted crime, one so horrendous that in order to identify



and prosecute the malefactors the normal rules of evidence need not be observed.<sup>10</sup>

While this naturally speaks to the wider evidence of children in witch trials, I have quoted it here because Abigail's is such an exceptional case and because she has frequently been accused of such 'fantasy'. Levack's assumptions about children's testimony in court rests on a true and certain knowledge of what children are: 'of course', 'simply', 'children are highly suggestible', 'because they', and '[t]hey are also capable'. As such, children are designated as a group and as subject to the same impulses, all of which are known to adults; and yet, such assumptions undermine the very basis of the trials in that so many histories assume that the adult judges were, somehow, hoodwinked both by the afflicted girls and by those that confessed to witchcraft. Further, the assumed divide between adults and children in this claim is also problematic in that, if we assume that the testimonies of children in the Salem trials were based on them being 'highly suggestible' and on their 'difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from reality', we are brought straight back to adulthood: it must have been adults who were suggesting such accusations if all children are subject to such suggestibility; while if it is only children who cannot tell fact from fiction, such claims to either must again originate outside of themselves while the adults of Salem—accusers and judges—must have known exactly what they were doing. In addition, the fact that this apparent unreliability of child witnesses was known—Salem's court procedures being based on the same texts used in England and records of such cases there, including the Pendle witch trials—can only be read to mean that the judges knew (under Levack's claims) that these children were unlikely to be telling the truth, but that they convicted on that basis anyway. As such, the judges would have been knowing murderers, no matter the assumption of witchcraft as a 'special category'. While these claims exonerate the children entirely, they trouble the circumstances under which any witch trials involving children as accusers or accused were conducted during this period and beyond, particularly as Levack further claims: 'In admitting the testimony of children in modern-day cases of satanic-ritual abuse, judges have come close to endorsing the same exceptional judicial standard'. In relating this passage to Abigail's case, one might therefore assume that her testimony—and those who testified to her prior confessions to covenanting with the devil and behaving contrary to expected childhood behavioural norms—has been given equal weight with adults in that any

confession or accusation of wrongdoing was automatically believed, no matter the source. But that belief was still predicated on an assumption of an underlying unreliability; one that seemed to determine the progression of Abigail's case and its later narration in history.

To return to Abigail's testimony about her own involvement in witchcraft, she told the judges during her first examination—one that took place in the full court with the afflicted girls in attendance—that she had seen 'dogs & many creatures' but, on questioning as to 'what dogs do you mean, ordinary dogs?' admitted that 'I mean the Devil'.<sup>11</sup> As such, language is central to Abigail's trial from the outset in that both the judges and Abigail herself immediately stumble upon the issue of language and meaning: the questioning judge—Hathorne or Corwin—asks what she means, and Abigail explains that what she meant was not at all what she said: in saying 'dogs', she meant 'the Devil'. In fact, the whole tenor of this examination, through the language of both interviewer and interviewee, revolves around truth, meaning, and the slipperiness of language. The questioner repeatedly exhorts Abigail to 'tell the truth', raising the distinct possibility that her testimony is deemed to be unreliable or likely to be so; however, this is also predicated on the assumption that this child knows the difference between truth and lies or 'fantasy and reality', and Abigail's responses—'I do tell no lye' among them—suggest that she believes herself to know the difference; even if this were a lie, she would therefore be telling it knowingly. Yet she also admits to being tricked by the devil: 'They would give me fine cloths. "And did they?" No.' In claiming that the devil, who appeared in the various shapes of a dog, a cat, and a man, could fool her, Abigail throws her own testimony into further doubt as her ability to tell the truth might be compromised by circumstances out of her control; that is, by the malign influence of an adult who could mislead her by lies. Abigail's testimony is also riddled with claims to a partial knowledge in her use of 'like': The Devil was 'Like a Man'; he was 'Like a Cat'; and she saw 'things like men'. Such claims betray a knowledge that such appearances were only seeming and that there was a deeper truth concealed beneath such likenesses, thus disturbing claims to the automatic veracity of spectral evidence and Cotton Mather's claims to 'see' the truthfulness of child witnesses.

In her three examinations, of which the latter two took place in prison on April 20 and May 12 respectively, it appeared that Abigail needed little prompting to confess to both a historical and a current involvement with witchcraft. She told the judges that she met the Devil in the woods at

Casco Bay, some three or four years before, and that he had promised her fine things that he never delivered; that she had made two separate covenants with the devil, the first for two years and the second for four years (much like apprenticeships and being bound-out, it seems that such diabolic covenants had a fixed term); that she hurt Mercy Lewis, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam Jr. via the use of wooden poppets; and that she had been to a witches' meeting in Reverend Parris' pasture, where the sacrament was administered and she ate red bread and drank red wine.<sup>12</sup> The third examination was perhaps the most explosive in terms of confessing to her own witchcraft as Abigail claimed to have not only hurt others by witchcraft but to have killed: 'Q. Did some of them dy? A. Yes. One of them was Mary Laurence that dyed. [...] Q. where did any other live that you afflicted? A. Just by ye Other towards James Andrews's, and they dyed also. Q. How many were they more than one? A. Yes.' Further, the questioner asked: 'Q: were they men, Women or Children you killed? A. They were both Boys and Girls.'<sup>13</sup> By this point, the language of seeming, and of truth and lies, has been suspended: both examiner and Abigail are speaking in absolutes only, in the binaries of yes and no, as she confesses to multiple murders. Yet while this appears to construct a different attitude towards the process than in the first examination, one that accepts Abigail's words as truth, this is problematised in that she was never charged with murder, only with covenanting and affliction, both of which she was found guilty. In assuming or discovering such extreme admissions as false, then, the whole of Abigail's testimony should have been thrown into doubt; but this was not the case, and this document gives a clue as to why, as will be seen below.

### ABIGAIL AFFLICTED

The later infamy of this young girl was not only secured by her extensive confessions but by her equally extensive accusations against others. During Abigail's first examination, she indirectly accused Goody Wilds of Topsfield, saying that 'I heard [my mother] say it was Goody Wilds at Topsfield'; she also said that she had seen Sarah Good, and that she knew Good was a witch because the devil had told her so.<sup>14</sup> At this point, then, she presented herself primarily as a witch rather than an accuser, with Good already charged and her accusation against Wilds merely hearsay. But this was to change by Abigail's second examination in prison the very next day; prompting the question of what made the judges question her

again and why this took place not in court but in prison. Unlike Abigail's first and last extant examinations, this second was only recorded in reported speech, with the Q&A format temporarily abandoned. While neither provides us with any reliable access to truth or to Abigail's voice, this summary works to occlude any line of questioning and positions Abigail rather as accuser. In her testimony, Abigail implicated 'Judah White, a Jersey maid that Lived with Joseph Ingeson at Cascoe, but now lives at Boston', who came to her in apparition accompanied by Sarah Good and tried to convince her not to confess to anything. They also told her that the previously accused Sarah Osborn was a witch. Yet despite this new accusation, there is no further mention of Judah White anywhere in the Salem trial records; unlike the accused figure of George Burroughs who figured heavily in Abigail's May 12 examination.

The first recorded accusation against Burroughs did not come from Abigail, but from Benjamin Hutchinson on April 22, alleging that Abigail Williams had claimed affliction by Burroughs the previous day. Williams, Burroughs, and Abigail Hobbs had all resided in Casco Bay and were likely acquainted. Abigail's name was not among the list of afflicted girls named on the April 30 joint complaint against Burroughs and others; however, the first record of his examination on May 9 is headlined: 'Examination of George Burroughs and Statement of Abigail Hobbs v. George Burroughs'.<sup>15</sup> Despite her confinement in jail, Abigail's role had developed from accused witch to accuser and afflicted in the intervening period since her last examination, in line with the status of the afflicted girls.

The transcript of Abigail's first examination had already revealed her problematic status as both accuser and accused, more so than most of the accused who also implicated others, due to her relationship with and position within the group of afflicted girls. At the end of her examination, when Abigail 'was taken DEAF', the present afflicted girls—named as Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Elizabeth Hubbard, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam Jr.—spoke on her behalf, testifying that Sarah Good and Sarah Osborn were 'run[ning] their fingers into the examinants ears'. Abigail's examination was also appended with two notes, commenting on this relationship: 'Note: The afflicted i.e. the bewitched persons were none of them tormented during the whole examination of this accused and confessing person Abigail Hobbs' and 'Note: After this examination Mercy Lewes, Abigail Williams, & Ann Putnam three of the sufferers said openly in Court, they were very sorry for the condition this poor Abig: Hobbs was in: which compassion they expressed over & over again.'<sup>16</sup> As

such, there was a sympathy, ‘a compassion’, between the afflicted and Abigail even before Burroughs’ accusation, but one which was to continue as the trials developed.

According to Hill, however, this sympathy between Abigail and the afflicted girls was based on something beyond any true compassion or even a desired or implied relationship of convenience between the two. She claims:

Such so-called compassion is chilling. It did not extend to their asking the magistrates if Abigail Hobbs might be kept out of jail. No doubt they gloried in the admiration it produced in court. There is a self-indulgence and melodrama in their expressing it “over and over again”. It is part of the same posturing as their histrionic scorn of less cooperative victims.<sup>17</sup>

While this passage is primarily about the afflicted girls rather than Abigail, it is of interest to this analysis in that it positions Abigail as entirely passive: she is voiceless where the afflicted girls get to both speak and choose not to speak; she is ‘cooperative’ by default, one assumes with the afflicted girls, no matter that it can also be read as cooperation with the judicial system; and she is ‘part of’ something other, a cooperative of ‘victims’. This is an astonishing departure from most historical commentary on Abigail (indeed, from Hill’s wider discussions of her, as considered below) in which she is almost routinely vilified and is very much an active and knowing participant, even a catalyst, in the trials. However, it also both constructs and comments on a power relationship between Abigail and the afflicted girls, for in her assumed cooperation, Abigail has gained a modicum of power in Hill’s analysis, one able to call forth some ‘compassion’, even if only to be vilified for it.

Back on May 9, at Burroughs’ examination, local people—not just girls but adults too—were lining up to testify against him: Susannah Sheldon claimed that Burroughs’ two previous wives had appeared in winding sheets, claiming that he had killed them; Ann Putnam Jr. claimed that his two dead children accused him too; and multiple men testified to his unnatural strength, among other accusations. It is only at the end that a brief summary of Abigail’s May 11 testimony is added, claiming that: ‘Geo: Burroughs in his Shape appeared to her, & urged her to set her hand to the Book; which she did; & afterwards in his own person he acknowledged to her, that he had made her set her hand to the Book’. In their note on this examination, Rosenthal et al. comment: ‘Confessors

were being used to support witchcraft claims against others, and Abigail Hobbs complied'.<sup>18</sup> Further, in their note to the full transcript of her May 11 examination which was recorded on the same sheet of paper as her April 21 examination, hence the seeming dislocation in the timeline in Rosenthal et al.'s records, they claim: 'The significance of Burroughs to the recorder is highlighted by the inclusion of the letter "B" in the left margin as his name recurs'.<sup>19</sup> As such, Abigail's status as accuser and afflicted is not based on how many others she accused, but on who they were: her accusation against Judah White was completely ignored, while her testimony against Burroughs was privileged above that of others, despite the fact that she was a confessed witch and that the truth of her earlier testimonies as to her own diabolical activities was in doubt.

Commenting on the importance of Abigail's case, Norton notes: 'Abigail Hobbs' confession of April 19, coupled with Ann Jr.'s spectral encounter with George Burroughs on the evening of April 20, transformed the 1692 witchcraft crisis from a serious but not wholly unprecedented set of incidents into the extraordinary events that played out over the next six months'.<sup>20</sup> As such, Norton positions Abigail's importance in the trials in similar terms to Salem's judiciary: her own confessions, which were considered truthful and important enough to lead to her arrest, imprisonment, indictment, and a guilty verdict against her, were less relevant to the progress of the trials than her accusation and those of the other afflicted girls against Burroughs. Yet why pick Abigail's April 19 confession as the important one, when her testimony against Burroughs did not take place until over a month later? We might therefore read the citing of these two incidents revolving around the two young girls as signalling instead that—in opposition to Boyer and Nissenbaum's claim—children were actually pivotal in the events of the trials as they progressed rather than simply an early catalyst; after all, Abigail's was the first confession since that of Dorcas/Dorothy and only the third overall.

Abigail's accusations did not end with George Burroughs, however. On June 1, she joined with her stepmother, Deliverance, and Mary Warren to accuse Burroughs, Good, and Osborn again, plus Bridget Bishop, Giles Corey, Rebecca Nurse, Elizabeth Proctor, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Abigail Soames, John Proctor, and Lydia Dustin. The claim read:

Abigail Hobbs then confessed before John Hathorn Jonathan Corwin Esq  
There at the generall meeting of the Witches in the feild near Mr Parrisses'  
house she saw Mr George Burroughs, Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn Bridgett

Bishop als Olliver and Giles Cory, two or three nights agone. Mr Burroughs came & sat at the window & told her he would terribly afflict her, for saying so much agt him & then pinched her.<sup>21</sup>

The appended note, written in the same hand, confirms Abigail's new position as afflicted as well as accuser: 'at the time of her taking of this deposcion Goody Nurse appeared in the roome & [...] almost Choaked Abigail Hobbs'. Of those accused in this short document, Abigail Soames escaped with her life; Elizabeth Proctor survived because she was pregnant; Sarah Osborn and Lydia Dustin died in prison; and the other eight were executed. Perhaps this, rather than her first examination as highlighted by Norton, was the turning point in establishing Abigail's career as one of the most effective accusers in Salem.

Her evidence continues into June, when she testified that John Proctor, alone in a room with her, said that 'she had better to afflict than be afflicted & yt she should not be hanged' if she would afflict Ann Putnam Jr. with a poppet that he brought for the purpose.<sup>22</sup> As Rosenthal et al. explain, the judges had again visited Abigail in prison to gather corroboratory evidence against someone they wished to convict; in this case, John Proctor, who was hanged on the evidence of many complainants on August 19. But again, without an even problematically reliable testimony including questions and answers, rather than a short summary such as this, we cannot know if Abigail was coerced into this testimony or to what extent, and also how her relationship with the afflicted girls, including Ann Putnam Jr., continued from her position in prison. And as late as September 7, Abigail continued her role as accuser in congress with the afflicted, testifying from prison that Alice Parker afflicted Mary Warren when Warren was in prison and that she had seen Parker afflict Ann Putnam Jr. by choking; again, this suggests that she and Ann Putnam Jr. had spent some time together, unless Ann was also able to travel in spirit or even that she colluded with the travelling spirit of Abigail, both claims that would likely have changed the course of the entire trials. Alice Parker was executed in the last group two weeks later, on September 22.

Given Abigail's involvement as accuser in so many of Salem's deaths, her relationships with the judges and with the afflicted must be subject to further investigation. Was her testimony valuable in uncovering new witches or, as seems more likely, was her role to confirm to the judges what they had already decided; that is, effectively to sign the death warrants of those the judges were convinced were guilty but for

whom they did not have quite enough evidence? And in terms of her position within the group of afflicted girls, did that early sympathy at her first examination result in her communion with them out of gratitude and/or obligation, or was there a pre-existing relationship about which we can only conjecture? In both cases, however, an interplay of power is evident: Abigail was in prison on charges of witchcraft, seemingly powerless, yet both judges and afflicted returned to her time and again to back up their claims, elevating her to a position of almost unbelievable power. Yet it was a power that was always conditional and, as we have seen, once the judges had no further use for her—or had decided that she was too dangerous to let live—her reign came to an abrupt halt.

As already mentioned, Abigail was the only child who was both convicted of witchcraft and sentenced to death, and on September 10, 1692, she was indicted under two charges: *maleficium*, for afflicting Mercy Lewis (although not for any of the other children whom she was accused of hurting), and covenanting with the devil in Casco Bay back in 1688 when she was no more than 10 or 12 years old. And this is one of the most interesting aspects of her case: despite claims that children were not executed in Salem, Abigail Hobbs was to be executed.<sup>23</sup> Further, despite the charges for affliction and covenanting, her admissions of multiple murders had been dismissed. While we can only conjecture as to the reasons, the likelihood is that either she was not believed or that her claims were proved to be false. Either way, a belief in any seeming lack of reliability or truthfulness on her part was not extended to her other allegations: George Burroughs and so many others were put to death as a result of her claims, if in tandem with the claims of other afflicted witnesses.

Abigail Hobbs leaves the court records, as do so many others, with a claim for compensation from her family: in September 1710, her father William claimed restitution for his daughter, accepting only 10 pounds despite claimed losses of over 40 pounds resulting from her imprisonment and expenses.<sup>24</sup> An order for payment was not made until February 19, 1712, some 20 years after the trials ended, by which point Abigail would have been in her early-mid thirties; she ‘marked’ the paper, showing she was still living at this point. Rosenthal et al. comment: ‘It is conspicuous, but not unique, that Abigail Hobbs received compensation in spite of her having been a confessor’.<sup>25</sup>



## ABIGAIL IN HISTORY

As might be expected, Abigail's appearance in the histories of Salem—when it is remarked upon at any depth—divides the crowd as to her motivations and state of mind when making such confessions; although, as with the afflicted girls with whom she had so much in common while never quite becoming one of them, much of the conjecture revolves around why she accused others rather than why she put her own life in such terrible and immediate danger.

One opinion comes from Stacy Schiff, who positions Abigail as, variously, 'wild Abigail Hobbs', 'cheeky Abigail Hobbs', and 'naughty Abigail Hobbs', claiming further: 'We recognize them by a sole detail [...] Abigail Hobbs was shameless'.<sup>26</sup> As such, Schiff constructs a version of Abigail who is out of control compared to the ideal Puritan child, yet one whom is responsible for her actions in that they were taken deliberately, rendering her both 'naughty' and 'shameless'; the implication being, of course, that she should feel shame, but that this is a shaming that she resisted then and continues to resist now. Schiff explains further:

Hathorne's second suspect that Tuesday delivered the richest rewards. The bad girl of neighboring Topsfield, fourteen-year-old Abigail Hobbs lived just over the village line. For some time she had bragged of a most un-Puritan childhood. She cavorted in the woods at night. She mocked her stepmother, who despaired of her. Several weeks earlier a friend had chided the visiting Abigail for her rudeness. Had she no shame? Hobbs directed her to hold her tongue or she would raise a ruckus. She boasted of her invincibility; she feared nothing, having sold her soul to Satan.<sup>27</sup>

Abigail, again, is positioned as not just *a* bad girl but as '*[t]he* bad girl' [my emphasis] of her town of Topsfield. She also bragged of 'a most un-Puritan childhood', a claim that might appear to suggest that Abigail was able to conceive of what a Puritan childhood should be and bragged that hers was nothing like it, but it is never reported in any accusations that Hobbs spoke in such terms. Rather, it is likely that Schiff is constructing an idea of what a Puritan childhood was, and positioning Abigail's words and deeds in opposition to it. However, given the extent of children's involvement in the crisis, both as accusers that became 'bad girls' later on and the accused who confessed to all manner of misdeeds but were later rendered innocent by court proclamation and by history, this might further question such received notions of what a Puritan childhood was rather than

what it should be. After all, the accused children all confessed to various misdemeanours and crimes, while the accusing girls also—it has been repeatedly if not consistently argued—knowingly sent innocent people to their deaths. Can Salem therefore be considered in any way indicative of what Puritan childhood actually was? Or, as is more likely, was a singular and knowable Puritan childhood just a fantasy, both then and now?

Schiff's portrait of Abigail is also of interest to this analysis in that it is predicated on what she did as much as what she said: 'she cavorted [...] she mocked [...] she boasted'. Unlike Hill's portrait, in which Abigail was the dumb accessory to the afflicted girls, she is constructed as active here, but this is an activity that always appears in excess of that which would be expected or tolerated, thereby resulting in Schiff's question (no matter that it is paraphrased from 'a friend'): 'Had she no shame?' And this claim to a shame that should be present but is lacking in Abigail, one repeated across analyses of her testimony and her role in the trials, is vital in considering the expected Puritan child and the ways in which each of Salem's children deviates from it, and particularly in assessing why Abigail has attracted so much vilification in histories of the trials. In her essay on 'Shame', Rose comments: 'shame is [...] an action, a transitive verb—to shame—with a very public face. Shaming someone can be a political project'.<sup>28</sup> So what is at stake—what political agenda is at play—in the shaming of Abigail Hobbs? While much of this might be read back to the expectations of a Puritan child in late seventeenth-century Massachusetts, the shaming of Abigail is taking place just as much now as it was in the court testimonies against her in 1692; but why? Perhaps it is because of what Rose claims further: 'But shaming is not always effective. Shame can be argued against or simply spurned'. Abigail's shame is in Schiff's questioning and assumption, one that both positions her as without shame and draws shame back as something to be desired; and it is in Abigail's repudiation of shame that her public shaming takes place. After all, even her final appearance in the court records is subject to the snarkiness of the historian commenting on her profiting out of such lies, with Upham noting: 'More was allowed to Abigail Hobbs, a very malignant witness against the prisoners, than to the families of several who were executed'.<sup>29</sup> As such, Abigail is never allowed to be the innocent victim of society, her elders, political machinations, or even mental illness in the way that even the much-demonised afflicted girls are at times: her shame is, and always will be, constructed through its very lack.

Baker offers a different perspective from Schiff, commenting rather on:

Abigail Hobbs, the teenager who openly bragged that she had disobeyed her parents because she had sold her soul to Satan and feared nothing. She went so far as to mock the Puritan faith, at one gathering making a show of sprinkling water in her stepmother's face and saying 'she baptized her in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost'. Whether Hobbs was 'acting out', suffering from mental illness, or simply enjoying being at center stage in a world where youths were truly meant to be seen and not heard seems unclear.<sup>30</sup>

This perspective is valuable because it also speaks to readings of the expected and ideal Puritan child, with the claim that Abigail 'openly bragged that she had disobeyed her parents' presupposing that such disobedience was not usual and that it was therefore something to brag about; a badge of honour among teenagers who perhaps would not dare do so themselves. Further, the link between disobedience to parents and selling one's soul to Satan shows the strength of both social and religious pressures on children to be obedient to their elders, very much in line with Cotton Mather's 1699 exhortations to the duty of children to their parents, and vice versa. In recounting the fake baptism of her stepmother, Deliverance Hobbs, Abigail is therefore constructed as outside of all childhood and societal norms of the period. Baker confines himself to a brief speculation on Abigail's motives but he resists a reductive explanation, claiming solely that it 'seems unclear'.

Despite a further confusion over her age, in which Abigail is claimed to be 22, Hill portrays Abigail in a similar manner to Schiff, claiming:

Abigail was as wild as the forests she resided so close to. She roamed them at night, sleeping under the stars. Her parents had lost all control over her. [...] When questioned by Hathorne, Abigail confessed to anything and everything. Her reputation had preceded her: she must have realized that denials would never be credited. She may even have believed much of what she was saying. [...] In any case, this was the kind of attention she had been seeking for years. No doubt the seriousness with which the magistrate was treating her claims to talk with the devil was exceedingly gratifying.<sup>31</sup>

The language of wildness and the active nature of 'roamed' and 'sleeping' are already familiar, as is the family relationship predicated on what it should be in order to secure its deviance in Hill's claim that 'her parents had lost all control over her'. What is interesting in this passage then, beyond the repetition across histories of Abigail that work to secure her

wildness and deviance in the ‘popular imagination’, is in the claims to intent: Hill writes variously ‘she must have realized’, ‘she may even have believed’, and ‘she had been seeking’. As she does elsewhere, Hill therefore shifts between the absolute of ‘had’, to the semi-definite of ‘must’, to the conditional of ‘may’. In seeking to understand and explain Abigail’s thought process—one which, by definition, can never be known—Hill (like many others) attempts to secure a resolution that always escapes even though it is one on which the demonisation of Abigail and the afflicted girls is so regularly predicated. And, as quoted earlier, this is an issue across analyses of the witch trial’s participants as Miller predicted: ‘language itself proves treacherous, and analysis rebounds on the analyst’.

However, in the middle of these comments on Abigail’s conditional guilt, Hill also considers the wider implications of her attitude and actions. She claims: ‘Such dissidence in those times seems amazing. It helps confirm the impression of a changing society and the gradual erosion of an ironclad Puritan control, so frightening a prospect to those who clung to old ways, including Cotton Mather, Samuel Parris, and Thomas Putnam.’ As such, despite what at first appears a damning indictment of Abigail’s behaviour, Hill’s analysis does return (albeit briefly) to Abigail’s relationship with the adult men who ruled Salem in many ways: Cotton Mather, whose *Memorable Providences* may have played a role in kickstarting the panic; Parris, whose fire-and-brimstone sermons before and early in the trials almost certainly did; and Thomas Putnam, under whose name the majority of witchcraft complaints were made. And, according to Hill, the roles of each of these men during the trials were based on fear: not just of the power of those who should remain subservient to the patriarchal imperative but who did not—namely women and children—but of the change that this ‘civil disobedience’ (as Henry David Thoreau would term it some 150 years later) signified. It is in this loss of the Puritan ideal that much of Salem’s harshness may have originated and in which the role of Salem’s children as scapegoats emerged. Yet it also posits that the accused, and even the accusers, were not alone in their fear, thereby figuring fear as potentially the most significant catalyst for the trials as they progressed.

Hite also discusses theoretical motivations for Abigail’s behaviour:

The possible explanations for Abigail Hobbs’s claims are many. She may have been traumatized by the threat posed by the Wabanakis a few years earlier, which was the probable reason for her family’s return to Topsfield [...] She might have enjoyed the notoriety of making such claims. It is also

possible that she was a child who was in some way “different” and suffered abuse at the hands of her peers. Concocting a story of having made a contract with the devil may have been a means of scaring bullies away.<sup>32</sup>

As with Hill’s reliance on conditionals, much of Hite’s consideration is necessarily conjecture, but the possible ‘reasons’ he suggests—childhood trauma, attention-seeking, and bullying—are very modern, as opposed to the overthrowing of Puritan norms posited elsewhere. Yet, like the others, Hite’s analysis relies on solving the problem of Abigail; that is, through a textual replaying of the trials to decide whether she is innocent or guilty by means of establishing intent. Even though Hite resists making a final judgement, his language still echoes what Sylvia Federici posits as ‘this tendency to blame the victims’, one which would ‘exculpate the witch hunters and depoliticize their crimes’.<sup>33</sup> After all, and as already discussed, Abigail’s relationship within the Salem power structure deserves far more attention given that ‘the witch hunters’ response to her ‘challenge to the power structure’ within Salem was to incarcerate and exploit her until her use had passed.<sup>34</sup>

### THE MONSTERING OF ABIGAIL HOBBS

Abigail was sentenced to death along with eight others on September 17, 1692. Of those eight, three—Wilmott Redd, Margaret Scott, and Samuel Wardwell Sr.—were hanged. Mather recounted: ‘In *December* 1692, the Court sate again at *Salem* in *New-England*, and cleared about 40 persons suspected for Witches, and Condemned three. [...] the Warrant for their Execution was sent, and the *Graves digged* for the said three, and for about five more that had been condemned at *Salem* formerly, but were Reprieved by the Govenour’.<sup>35</sup> Abigail was among the five. But that is not the end of Abigail’s story in that her reprieve did little or nothing to secure her status as innocent, with her status even among the afflicted girls that of the worst. And it is interesting to consider how such judgements are reached, particularly if one considers Abigail’s case alongside two other accused and accusing girls, Abigail’s uncanny twins, Margaret Jacobs and Mary Lacey Jr. As discussed previously, Margaret—like Abigail and like many others—was both accused and accuser. Like Abigail, she sent people to their deaths. But in Margaret’s case, she exhibited (and, crucially, recorded) the required shame; and although it was too little, too late for those she accused, it has resulted in her heroic status in history, while a lack of any recorded shame

from Abigail has instead demonised her. Mary Lacey Jr.'s fate as recorded in history is closer to that of Abigail, no matter that her experience may have been closer to that of Margaret: one of the early afflicted girls, she too felt remorse and shame and turned away from them; like Margaret, she was arrested as a witch. But she did not have Margaret's strength of will and, despite considerable documentary evidence of her struggles with mental health and the threats of her own hanging if she did not recant, her eventual return to her afflicted status has resulted in her being allied far more closely with Abigail than with Margaret: Schiff constructs them as 'those loudmouthed, plot-propelling bad girls Abigail Hobbs and Mary Lacey Jr., who may actually have believed they had signed pacts with the devil and sound as if they would have if they could'.<sup>36</sup> In coming to such conclusions, Schiff might well be considering evidence such as that given by Rebecca Eames, who claimed that Abigail and Mary Lacey Jr. spent 'four days mocking me and spitting in my face saying they knew me to be an old witch and IF I would not confesse it I should very Spedily be hanged'.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that we should accept the sliding scale of blame and shame under which these girls are judged, with Abigail always at the bottom of the pile and acting as a yardstick against which others are measured; rather, it is important to note that even Margaret's semi-canonisation is predicated on her previous shame. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne's fictional scarlet woman, Hester Prynne, Margaret's social acceptance and eventual elevation is based upon both her own publicly performed shame and that of others. And here, it is the shame of those that might be and often are constructed as children that is at stake, with the assumption that—here, at least—children should hold themselves to the same moral standards as their elders and be judged by their success and failure in doing so.

In narratives of Salem, Abigail rarely escapes accusations of guilt in some respect, including of being a fantasist in relation to her confessions of witchcraft both before and during the trials and in her accusations against others. And perhaps this is why she is so often peripheralised in discussions of the trials: she is dismissed as deluded, as mentally ill, or as just plain 'evil', with each dismissal predicated on and resulting in her status as known and therefore as in little need of discussion. Yet within that dismissal can be read a further othering of Abigail compared to the other accused and afflicted girls; perhaps even what Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle figure as a 'social monsterring', one predicated on this very undiscussability.<sup>38</sup> Abigail is not a question but an answer, the monstrous other

necessary to keep the innocence of childhood intact. Even now, with the binary seemingly set at Dorcas/Dorothy and her unassailable innocence versus Ann Putnam Jr., the most active of the afflicted girls but one whom we can yet forgive after her belated confession to a conditional wrongdoing, Abigail Hobbs is always othered in that she never refuted her testimony either to her own guilt or that of others, and neither was she accused, as Elizabeth Johnson Jr. was by her grandfather, Francis Dane, of being 'Simplish at ye best'.<sup>39</sup> She did not change her mind like Margaret Jacobs, or even let us see her inner torment like her alter ego Mary Warren. Her only claim to innocence is in allowing her father to claim expenses and damages for her incarceration. She remains the other, the monster, as seen in one of her few appearances in fiction by first the minor character with her name in Thomas Harris' novel *Red Dragon*, followed by her promotion to an accomplice to her father's serial murders in the TV series, *Hannibal*, where she develops a father-daughter type relationship with Hannibal Lecter. Abigail may not have acted alone—her testimony and its horrific results may have been predicated on her relationship with the patriarchal figures of the judges, plus a further uneasy relationship with the afflicted (a group also encouraged and enabled by Salem's men)—but this does not assuage her blame or her shame. Even as an accomplice, she remains, in the 'popular imagination', a monster.

Finally, then, in considering Abigail within the remit of this work as one of Salem's children, what does this positioning outside of a childhood norm that still exists in narratives of Salem mean? After all, no matter that such a posited norm is shattered by most of the Essex County children recorded by history due to their roles in the witchcraft panic, their deviance is still predicated on an assumed and desired normative Puritan or even modern child. But with Abigail othered beyond this accepted level of deviance, she is rarely figured as a child in any of the works that discuss her. In her position not just as outside the bounds of acceptable *child* behaviour but as outside of acceptable *human* behaviour—in the judgement that renders her as such rather than in any stable definition of what deserves to be counted as human and what does not—Abigail is divested of any existence as child at all. As outside the home (in the 'wild'), as outside of the afflicted girls (from her position in prison and their testimonies against her), and in her status as the only condemned child, she—more than anyone—represents Freud's uncanny, *unheimlich*: there is no place for her anywhere. At best, she is only a dark reflection that we cannot ever admit as part of ourselves and as part, then, of every child.

## NOTES

1. Rosenthal et al., p. 189.
2. Norton, p. 119. With thanks to Norton for the details of Abigail's history, much of which lay outside the remit of my research as this work does not aim to be a history.
3. Rosenthal et al., p. 193.
4. Rosenthal et al., p. 194.
5. Rosenthal et al., p. 194.
6. Norton, pp. 118–119.
7. Norton, p. 120.
8. Bridget Bishop was the first 'witch' to be executed.
9. Rosenthal et al., p. 182.
10. Levack (2016) *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge), pp. 270–271.
11. Rosenthal et al., p. 189.
12. Rosenthal et al., pp. 189–191, 198.
13. Rosenthal et al., p. 199. Much of this is lost in the original document; I am quoting as recorded by Rosenthal et al., as informed by Woodward.
14. Rosenthal et al., p. 191.
15. Rosenthal et al., p. 240.
16. Rosenthal et al., p. 192.
17. Hill, p. 117.
18. Rosenthal et al., p. 242.
19. Rosenthal et al., p. 199.
20. Norton, p. 120.
21. Rosenthal et al., p. 350.
22. Rosenthal et al., p. 416.
23. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 171.
24. Rosenthal et al., p. 874.
25. Rosenthal et al., pp. 900–901.
26. Stacy Schiff, *The Witches*, pp. 13, 124, 245, 283.
27. Schiff, pp. 117–119.
28. Rose, *On Not Being Able to Sleep*, p. 1.
29. Upham, p. 481.
30. Baker, p. 103.
31. Hill, p. 116.
32. Hite, p. 19.
33. Silvia Federici (2004) *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia), p. 164.
34. Federici, p. 164.
35. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 171.



36. Schiff, p. 388.
37. Hite, p. 160.
38. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (1995) 'Mutant', *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1999), pp. 223–232, 226.
39. Rosenthal et al., p. 735.



## Fictionalising Salem: The Reconstructed Child

Salem's story has been played out on screen, on stage, and in fictional retellings over the last century and beyond as interest in its history, and in the supernatural more generally, continues to grow. While I have already drawn on several such sources in the preceding chapters, this chapter will consider the fictionalisation of the Salem witch trials more widely, with a particular focus on the roles assigned to children in these narratives. Salem stories primarily take two paths: those based on the historical events to some extent, and those that take these events as a starting point but are based in the modern-day and/or on fictional (or fictionalised) characters. However, the common thread among most of these works is that children and adolescents are positioned as witches, although the narratives of such positioning vary widely. I will therefore analyse the role of genre in constructing Salem's children in the 'popular imagination' and ask how these fictional narratives in which children are witches have impacted on our understanding of historical events. I am focusing on four particular works—Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*; Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*; Adriana Mather's YA novel, *How to Hang a Witch*, and J. K. Rowling's movie and screenplay, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*—because I believe that each deserves a wider consideration in this study because each treats the events at Salem from a less direct perspective; that is, each either claims or has been claimed to be about something 'other' than Salem and its children, yet Salem's children are still notable participants in each. Further, each narrative impacts on how writers and

readers have continued to play out the trial process by attributing innocence to some children and evil intent to others. I therefore want to consider how such narratives impact on popular (as well as academic) understanding of childhood in the Salem witch trials.

### DESCENDANTS AND DESCENDANCE

In a perhaps unexpected twist on the witch and afflicted family relationships discussed in Chap. 5, a claim to a 'leakiness' of the core biological family in the Salem trials can also be made due to the modern-day status of those who call themselves 'descendants', primarily of executed 'witches' but also of those accused and, on occasion, others such as trial judges. In claiming such descentance, people are claiming a leakiness of the core family in that, hundreds of years later, one can still claim special status due to one's descentance. Many writers of fiction based on the Salem witch trials—particularly fiction for or about children and familial relationships—themselves claim descentance from victims of the trials. Katherine Howe—author of novels for young adults and adults based on fictional modern-day descendants and their involvement in witchcraft and their own history—claims that she is '[d]escended from three women who were tried for witchcraft in Salem'.<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Kent, author of *The Heretic's Daughter*, 'grew up listening to stories about her ancestor Martha Carrier, stories that ultimately informed *The Heretic's Daughter*'. And similarly, Kathleen Benner Duple's YA novel, *The Sacrifice*, is based on the history of 'my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Reverend Dane and my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother Abigail Faulkner'.<sup>2</sup> And from the other side of the accused/accuser divide, Adriana Mather's YA fiction, *How to Hang a Witch*, tells the fictional tale of descendants of both the convicted 'witches' and her own ancestors, Cotton and Increase Mather.

Other writers who do not claim personal descentance, such as Deborah Harkness in *A Discovery of Witches*, consider the importance of family, descentance, and ancestry in their works: while this novel does not claim to tell the story of Salem in any form, Harkness' heroine is descended from Bridget Bishop (who appears in ghost-form) and John Proctor; both of whom are cast as 'real' witches.<sup>3</sup> Each of these novels not only considers the family element of the witch trials, in which children were usually accused along with their mother and encouraged to implicate her in

their crimes; each novel also claims—to some extent—that Salem’s witchcraft was (and remains) real.

### NEGOTIATING GENRE

While I am considering each of the above-named works as fiction based on the Salem witch trials, it is worth taking some time to consider what such a designation might mean: after all, at the simplest level, there are variations between novel, play, and movie, and between manuscripts and stage/screen adaptations. So how can we use these works to trouble both their own status *as* fiction and their opposition to the history we might read in critical and academic works and even in contemporary and trial documents? I want to begin such a consideration with a look at disclaimers printed with (or in) two texts—Miller’s *The Crucible* and Adriana Mather’s *How to Hang a Witch*—to consider the difficulties in separating the ‘historical’ from the ‘fictional’ child in these works and others.

It has long been accepted that Miller’s 1953 play is not ‘about’ the events in Salem in 1692 at all, rather reflecting his reaction to the dangers of McCarthyism in 1950s America and the subsequent actions of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC), which subpoenaed him to testify in 1956 and cited him for contempt of Congress in 1957 for his refusal to cooperate.<sup>4</sup> Yet, much popular contemporary understanding of the Salem trials derives from Miller’s play, despite his disclaimer that ‘[t]his play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian’.<sup>5</sup> An understanding of this play that positions it as about 1950s America rather than 1690s Salem derives principally from a prefatory note ‘on the Historical Accuracy of this play’, which is reproduced here in full:

This play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian. Dramatic purposes have sometimes required many characters to be fused into one; the number of girls involved in the ‘crying out’ has been reduced; Abigail’s age has been raised; while there were several judges of almost equal authority, I have symbolized them all in Hathorne and Danforth. However, I believe that the reader will discover here the essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history. The fate of each character is exactly that of his historical model, and there is no one in the drama who did not play a similar—and in some cases exactly the same—role in history.

As for the characters of the persons, little is known about most of them except what may be surmised from a few letters, the trial record, certain broadsides written at the time, and references to their conduct in sources of varying reliability. They may therefore be taken as creations of my own, drawn to the best of my ability in conformity with their known behavior, except as indicated in the commentary I have written for this text.<sup>6</sup>

In this disclaimer, if one can read it as such, Miller attempts to position his work in terms of what it is not: 'This play is not history'. Yet while this seeks to stabilise the concept of 'play', it disturbs textual form in other ways: after all, Miller is not discussing plays in general but '[t]his play', thereby separating it from any other plays and situating it in terms of the history he is attempting to deny. Similarly, the claim to history as opposed or simply removed from what 'this play' is, is troubled as 'history' is subject to 'the sense in which the word is used', here by the 'academic historian'. As such, Miller is considering the fluidity not just of textual form but of language, with both 'play' and 'history' subject to an inherent instability of language and its usage by any particular person or group of persons, with a further assumption that 'the academic historian' is a singular creature or one that can stand for all that either claim themselves to be such or are claimed as such by others; a form of agreement that might be less acceptable to members of any such group.

Miller continues to explain why this play is not a history in the sense of his usage here: many characters have been fused into one and the age of a key character, Abigail Williams, 'has been raised', with both decisions taken for 'dramatic purposes'. While such a claim might appear simple enough—that there were simply too many judges, afflicted girls, and accused to fit them all into a four-act play, thereby necessitating such a fusing of characters—Miller's explanation returns him to an understanding of history already troubled from his first sentence: an unproblematic history, known and available to all, that can be retrieved if only to be rewritten in such a manner. In addition, he is still claiming that he has relied on such a history for the basis of his work and needs to acknowledge this basis, even as he troubles it in his claimed genre of 'this play'. Further, Miller distances himself from many of the decisions that he has ostensibly taken by his use of the passive voice: 'the number of girls involved in the "crying out" has been' reduced; Abigail's age 'has been raised' and 'little is known', thus troubling the assumed relationship between author and text, particularly in the rewriting of such an event. He continues to

struggle with his attempted delineation of textual form with the claim that: 'I believe that the reader will discover here the essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history', with its associated problems and oppositions of 'I believe', 'the reader', 'the essential nature', 'chapters', and 'human history' all serving to blur the claimed boundary between play and history.

The second paragraph of this disclaimer continues to trouble textual form through its claims to writing as art, through 'creations', 'drawn', and 'I have written'. Yet it also works somewhat differently, as Miller assesses history as text, noting that little is known about 'the characters of the persons' except what can be gleaned from 'a few letters, the trial record, certain broadsides written at the time, and references to their conduct in sources of varying reliability'. As such, he acknowledges that history *is* text and that, in the variety of sources available and our own analysis of their reliability, history is no more stable than 'play', fiction, or any other claimed genre in purveying a simple truth that can be known as such by all; and Miller's depiction of the 'characters', though he directs us to 'take them' as fiction based on 'conformity with their known behavior', is as relevant to our understanding of the trials as all other textual forms.

Adriana Mather's 2016 YA novel, *How to Hang a Witch*, is a variation of the descendant narrative that characterises many novels informed by the Salem witch panic. Her author's note discusses the familial link, including a comment from a modern-day Salem bookstore owner that 'Mather [...] isn't a popular name around here'; with the assumption that a common name or ancestry brings its own negativity, much like the assumptions of witchcraft running in families back in 1692.<sup>7</sup> The premise of Mather's novel is that the fictional narrator, Samantha Mather, has moved to Salem from New York and is targeted by a group of teens in her school known collectively as the Descendants; yet it is Samantha's own status as a descendant that kick-starts a curse when people from the witch-descendant families begin to die. Add a ghostly adolescent boy, the seriously deranged revenant of Ann Putnam Jr., and the spirit of Cotton Mather which appears as the Descendants hang at Putnam's direction, and Adriana Mather has created a blend of modern ghost story and a version of Salem history in which the adolescents take centre stage. In this tale, as in much supernatural YA fiction, witchcraft is real, as are ghosts, and all matter of other phenomena.

What interests me here, however, is the disclaimer on the editorial details page, which reads:

This is a work of fiction. All incidents and dialogue, and all characters with the exception of some well-known historical and public figures, are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Where real-life historical or public figures appear, the situations, incidents, and dialogues concerning those persons are fictional and are not intended to depict actual events or to change the fictional nature of the work. In all other respects, any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.<sup>8</sup>

Like Miller, Mather (or her editorial team) attempts to direct readings of her work away from the history from which it is ostensibly produced, in the apparently unproblematic claim that '[t]his is a work of fiction'; and, like Miller, Mather runs into trouble when she tries to justify this statement. Exceptions must be made to her claim, notably the 'well-known historical and public figures' who are unnamed here, either because they are too well-known to make this necessary or because to name them might trouble their existence as fictional even further. While this disclaimer might seem very much along the line of Miller's, this acts less as an explanation—as did Miller's first-person account—than as a legal disclaimer, hidden in the small print of the editorial details on an unnumbered page prior to the dedications and first chapter. Yet it also calls the status of such works into question, in that very need to make such a disclaimer: might readers think that Cotton Mather's ghost actually appeared in present-day Salem? Or that Ann Putnam Jr. lived on in modern form, wreaking revenge on the descendants of her enemies? As such, this attempt to establish a line between fiction and history only serves to blur the categories still further.

The point of reading these two fairly minor pieces of text—often thought of as supplementary or even irrelevant to the 'main' text—is not simply to point out any difficulties or inconsistencies in establishing categories or forms of text; rather, it is to consider why we might read these texts, what is at stake in doing so, and how such readings continue to inform the cultural memory of Salem's children.

### THE CHILD, THE ADOLESCENT, THE WITCH

The Salem child as witch has already been the focus of several chapters in this work through its depiction as such in various textual forms, including works of fiction. But I would like to consider further how childhood in Salem is negotiated via children in fiction not claimed to be based on any historical character; through those who are linked by name or

characterisation to the trials; and in the difference between depictions of younger children and adolescents, problematic though those terms might be in our understanding of a childhood that is constructed in and of language. In making such a division at this point, I am not constructing or assuming any artificial boundaries of age, experience, and so on, but instead am reading each character's status in its own text; as such, some characters may (and do) trouble that divide.

One nineteenth-century text that portrays the witch child in some depth is Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. I will therefore consider his character of Pearl as child, and how, in her witchcraft, she troubles the assumptions of a Puritan childhood as portrayed by Hawthorne. The New England novelist's connections to the Salem witch trials have long been a matter of record: descended from famously unrepentant Judge John Hathorne, Hawthorne was born in Salem in 1804 and was the first member of the family to change his surname in order to distance himself from his infamous ancestor. Many of Hawthorne's works reflected on Salem's tragic past and his own relations to it, forming perhaps the first Descendant narrative though, like Adriana Mather, as the descendant of a judge rather than an accused witch. Stories such as 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835), 'The White Old Maid' (1835), and, of course, the novel *The House of Seven Gables* each reflect on the events of 1692 and Hawthorne's ongoing experiences of them.

So why discuss *The Scarlet Letter* rather than those tales most commonly associated with the trials? After all, while this novel is set in Puritan Salem, it is not about the witch trials but about the social shaming of a woman for adultery. However, 'The Custom House' introduction to the novel, like *The House of Seven Gables*, reflects on Hawthorne's connection to 'the hanging judge', while the wider novel further considers the correlation of childhood and witchcraft through the character of Hester Prynne's illegitimate daughter, Pearl, in addition to the character of Mistress Hibbins, the sister of Governor Bellingham, who 'a few years later, was executed as a witch'.<sup>9</sup> Pearl is the offspring of an illicit relationship between Hester and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, who appears at the beginning of the novel when her mother is released from Salem prison where she has been confined for an adultery that is revealed to the waiting crowd of Puritan matrons through the scarlet letter 'A' that she is now required to wear on her clothing at all times and through the presence of her baby:



When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm and [...] looked around at her townspeople and neighbors.<sup>10</sup>

At first read, it may appear that this passage is far more concerned with the previously mentioned theme of shame and shaming than it is with Salem witchcraft. Yet there are parallels. Hester has been imprisoned with her young child, the assumed innocence of the child not preventing her incarceration as was frequently the case in 1692 Salem. But any such innocence is up for question here: ‘this child’ and ‘the baby’—Pearl is not yet named—is a token of her mother’s shame and the symbol and embodiment of a public shaming. Further, the judgement of the Puritan townspeople in this scene echoes many of the issues raised through the trials, when such judgement resulted in accusation and criminal proceedings. This passage also begins an association between witchcraft, sex, and shame that runs throughout the novel, with witch child Pearl born from and in sin, and the focus on Hester’s body as a sexual object through claims to ‘stood fully revealed’ and the attempt to hide her ‘bosom’ with Pearl, followed by her removal to let the sexual body of the mother be seen by the hostile public gaze.

As she grows, Pearl is constructed at odds with the traditional Puritan child as imagined by Hawthorne:

The truth was, that the little Puritans, being of the most intolerant brood that ever lived, had a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with ordinary fashions, in the mother and child; and therefore scorned them in their hearts, and not infrequently reviled them with their tongues. Pearl felt the sentiment, and requited it with the bitterest hatred that can be supposed to rankle in a childish bosom.<sup>11</sup>

According to this passage, the intolerance of the children is predicated on their status as Puritans, albeit ‘little’ ones. It is also based on a sense of difference between themselves and Pearl, one that requires them to ostracise her both internally, ‘in their hearts’, and externally through ‘revil[ing] them with their tongues’; for their condemnation is not just of Pearl but of Hester too, based on their relation of ‘mother and child’. And the

difference between them is a supernatural one, 'a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with ordinary fashions', that sets the pair apart from the Puritan children who are normalised and 'ordinary' through their own worldview, if not through Hawthorne's in which they are belong to a 'brood' pathologised as 'the most intolerant'. Yet Pearl's reaction to the attitude of the other children allies her with them rather than separating her further, in that she returns hatred with hatred and in the same extreme degree that Hawthorne attributes to the Puritans: 'Pearl felt the sentiment, and requited it with the bitterest hatred that can be supposed to rankle in a childish bosom'. Both sets of children are characterised by their extremes of emotion, despite the differences between them that may exist only through the Puritan children's feelings, but which Hawthorne does not challenge.

Hawthorne's depiction of the Salem witch child is similar to those of trial historians in that Pearl's status is construed by her relationship with her mother as in the above passage, but is also as at variance with it: Hester is not a witch, but Pearl is; she comforts her mother but also tortures her; she is child but also symbol of adultery in terms of language (the 'A' that always represents adultery when applied to Pearl, though the townspeople eventually start to see it as meaning 'able' rather than 'adultery' as Hester ministers to the sick and needy; showing the mutable nature of symbol and language in this text); and Hester has little or no control over her daughter, in contrast to most mother-child witch narratives in which the child is passively given to the devil and directed as to what to do and who to hurt: Pearl is no familiar, but hurts on her own account.

Pearl's witchcraft is not only implied, however; Hawthorne spells it out, claiming: 'The unlikeliest materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever occupied the stage of her inner world'.<sup>12</sup> The stick, rags, and flower were 'the unlikeliest materials' and yet they '*were*' [my emphasis] the 'puppets of Pearl's witchcraft'. There is no question from Hawthorne's narrator that what she is doing is witchcraft; even if it is explained as 'her inner world', such a designation does not detract from the initial claim to intent as to their use. Further, as already discussed in terms of the Salem trial records, 'puppets' or poppets were very common in witchcraft, often forming part of the accusations made against Salem's witches, and were made from whatever materials were at hand, with wood and rags in particular frequently thus employed. One might argue that Hawthorne's construction of Pearl's play is not

about witchcraft-related poppets that were used for malefic purposes, but these materials are still being used, if not to fashion into the form of a human, at least to be adapted ‘spiritually’ for Pearl’s own ‘inner’ witchcraft. In this passage, the child is witch, and is so with no reference to anyone else, human or evil spirit, with witchcraft something that takes place within, albeit with the assistance of outer objects that both do and do not change their shape.

However, the next quote reverts to Cotton Mather’s conception of a witchcraft in which witches dedicate their children to the devil and have them suckle imps: ‘[Hester] remembered [...] the talk of the neighbouring townspeople [...] had given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring [...] nor was Pearl the only child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned, among the New England Puritans’.<sup>13</sup> According to Mather, the child did not spring from demons but from parents who were witches even though they were then suckled by imps; here, however, the charge is that Pearl was the child of a demon. Of course, this is primarily a claim in and about language through ‘the talk [...] had given out [...] was assigned’ rather than about who might or might not be Pearl’s actual father, of which we are pretty confident given that this question is central to the novel’s plot. However, this passage also works to continue the tropes of both sexual shaming and sex with the devil that have formed part of later analyses of the trials if not of contemporary reports; here, the assumption of sex with the devil both implicates and frees the mother in that she is guilty of both aberrant behaviour and of thereby demonising her innocent child, ‘poor little Pearl’, but it also removes the personal stigma of failure in that it is a wider category of mothers that is implicated in that Pearl was not ‘the only child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned’ and in that the necessity of an assignation detracts from any claim to truth.

In a chapter entitled ‘The Elf-Child and the Minister’—thus further removing Pearl from the workaday Puritan world of Salem and into the realm of the supernatural by what must be the circumstances of her birth—Hawthorne writes: “‘The little baggage hath witchcraft in her, I profess,” said [Mr. Wilson] to Mr. Dimmesdale. “She needs no old woman’s broomstick to fly withal!” [...] “A strange child!” remarked old Roger Chillingworth. “It is easy to see the mother’s part in her.”’<sup>14</sup> Mr. Wilson, Salem’s minister in the novel, remarks that Pearl has witchcraft ‘in her’: witchcraft from this perspective is again located as interior, needing no outside assistance or relation such as that which might derive from the

mother; indeed Wilson stresses that claim by saying she has no need even of a broomstick, one that he naturalises in its relation to an 'old woman'. As in many other ostensibly fictional texts, witchcraft is real in this novel, as is the stereotype of the crone-like witch, with the Governor's sister, Mistress Hibbins, described as 'the old witch-lady', 'the reputed witch-lady', and 'the witch', all in the space of a page.<sup>15</sup> Yet in this quote, witchcraft belongs both entirely to Pearl and entirely to childhood; Mr. Wilson cuts it off from any point of origin or relation at all. This is also reflected by 'this little baggage'; she may still be gendered as 'she', but some humanity has been taken away. However, Hester's erstwhile husband Chillingworth disagrees with this perspective, claiming: 'It is easy to see the mother's part in her'. As such, witchcraft returns to a genetic or taught parental point of origin, and one that can be seen by the adult male gaze. While this might appear to let Pearl off the hook in that her witchcraft has not been chosen, it fails to do so, rather extending her witchcraft back to her mother—with Hester therefore retrospectively figured as witch—rather than rendering Pearl as innocent.

This blurring of the boundaries between Pearl as witch on and by her own account and with a witchcraft derived from her mother has several effects if we consider it within and as a narrative of the Salem trials and of the associated correlation of childhood with witchcraft. It serves to naturalise the connection between children and a witchcraft that is assumed here as real as, after all, in neither construction is Pearl without witchcraft; it implicates the mother in a discourse of family witchcraft, one that is passed on both genetically, through both witch mother and devil father, as read in courtroom narratives such as those of the Carrier children; and it troubles any idea that children in Salem could be innocent, not just of witchcraft, but at all when the sins of the mothers, at least, are always visited on their children.

Another depiction of Salem witches with characters not claimed to be based on historical or lived children can be found in J. K. Rowling's 2016 movie and screenplay, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.<sup>16</sup> In considering this movie, a spin-off from the *Harry Potter* series, I will look at both movie and screenplay to see how each presents witch children and Salem, and how they both construct and disturb child/adult boundaries. The story is based in 1920s New York, where a hapless English wizard, Newt Scamander, arrives with a suitcase full of the titular 'fantastic creatures' and with a faulty clasp which results in some of them escaping and creating havoc around the city. Much of the plot is of little relevance to

this analysis; therefore, I will focus on Rowling's creation of the 'Second Salemers' or the Barebone family: mother Mary-Lou, son Credence, and daughters Chastity and Modesty. They are introduced to the movie when Scarmannder pursues his escaped Niffler up the steps of the city bank, only to be stopped by what the screenplay describes as 'a rally of the New Salem Philanthropic Society', although they refer to themselves as 'the Second Salemers' in both text and film.<sup>17</sup> This society consists of a family, with the mother wearing 'a 1920s version of Puritan dress', speaking to the assembled crowd. On spotting Newt, she accosts him: 'Are you a seeker? A seeker after truth?' to which Newt replies: 'I'm more of a chaser, actually'.<sup>18</sup> Although this is something of an in-joke for Potter fans—both seeker and chaser being positions in the team sport, Quidditch, established in the prior *Harry Potter* series—this exchange both serves to unite the two storylines and to introduce the binary positions on witchcraft that exist within the movie: the viewer/reader knows that magic is real; the No-Majs ('Muggles' in *Harry Potter*; non-magic people to the rest of us) have no idea that wizards and witches exist; but with the Second Salemers disrupting said binary in that they know or suspect that witches exist, but want them eradicated.

At this point, it would be worth considering the naming of this family group and its links to the town of Salem. As both script and movie make clear, the action is set in New York in the 1920s, not Salem in 1692; neither is there any hint that this group either comes from or otherwise belongs to Salem, Massachusetts, in any era. What, then, is the link to Salem beyond the name? If the Barebone family have no apparent geographical connection to Salem, the link might be read as an ideological one: as their banner depicting the breaking of a wand shows, their aim is to root out witchcraft and wizardry (Rowling's depiction is strictly gendered, with only women earning the title of 'witch') from America. Yet, in denying the audience an explanation—or assuming that no such explanation is necessary—the writers and creators of the movie are assuming a cultural memory of Salem that fills in the blanks; and it is a complicated one, particularly as this is a universe in which witchcraft and wizardry not only exist but—in the *Harry Potter* movies, at least—are largely celebrated, if by no means claimed as any more perfect than their non-magical counterparts except by characters constructed in terms of their deviance from a desired norm. As such, this witch hunt (similarly to claims made by Donald Trump and various other public figures accused of misdeeds in our time and world) is one founded on an unjust persecution. Here, the persecutors

are a woman and children, reflecting a view of the Salem trials in which men are largely absent or irrelevant: a Salem where women and children were the primary accusers and the accused are all, in their eyes, guilty.

Any claim to the Second Sailemers as a family also deserves to be investigated in more depth, as the movie and screenplay do not act entirely in tandem. The stage directions to the screenplay explain the Barebones as 'Mary Lou's three adopted children, adults Credence and Chastity, and Modesty (an eight-year-old girl)'.<sup>19</sup> As such, actors, directors, and readers of the screenplay are led to think of the family in terms of a division between adult and child, while viewers of the movie are left to make up their own minds (at this early point, at least). Yet even this textual claim is problematised by their status as 'Mary-Lou's three adopted children': Credence and Chastity are both children and adults, recalling the leakiness of the witch family in my prior reading of Salem's family relationships. Further, Modesty's status as 'an eight-year-old girl' is contained in parentheses, in contrast to that of the 'adults', and the claim that all three are adopted is not evident to the movie viewer until much later in the action. As in stories and records of 1692 Salem, then, the family unit is 'leaky', consisting of children who are only problematically children yet are still divided in terms of the age of one child only; a mother who is both mother and adoptive or stepmother; and a family whose status is reconfigured depending on either watching the movie or reading the screenplay, despite a claim via the title to sameness. Further, there is no indication in either movie or screenplay that the mother-figure is a witch, while at least two of the children turn out to be witches in one sense or another (as will be discussed in detail below); rather, the mother repudiates what her adopted children are, with her physical and emotional abuse of them during and prior to the movie—as signalled by Credence removing his belt without being asked when he is late home, and later showing the whip marks on his hand—predicated on a claim that such violence can remove witchcraft from a child. (It is worth noting that John Proctor claimed to be able to whip the witchcraft out of Mary Warren, and others said they could or would do the same.) And, finally here (though there is more that can be said; space prevents a fuller analysis), Mary-Lou rejects her own adopted status as mother late in the movie when she tells Credence: 'I am not your ma! Your mother was a wicked, unnatural woman!', thus confirming that she is not Credence's biological mother; that she knows that his mother was a witch, with the possibility that this makes Credence a wizard, with magic usually running in families in the *Harry Potter* world; and also

provoking Modesty to witchcraft in her sudden and supernatural removal of Credence's belt from Mary-Lou's fist, before Credence—as the Obscurus—kills his replacement, unmagical mother.<sup>20</sup>

The links of this problematically titled family to witchcraft are troubled from the outset. While they are introduced as persecutors of witchcraft—therefore acknowledging its existence, even as they seek to eradicate it—the Barebones are divided further through the language and actions of two of its children: Modesty and Credence (Chastity barely gets a look-in in terms of dialogue, though her name hints at an assumed Puritanical repudiation of sex also seen in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and beyond). Modesty takes centre-stage at the run-down church-based headquarters of the group, playing a game of hopscotch by herself, while singing, at various points: 'My momma, your momma / gonna catch a witch / My momma, your momma / flying on a switch / My momma, your momma / witches never cry / My momma, your momma / witches gonna die!'; 'Witch number three, gonna watch her burn / Witch number four, flogging / takes a turn'; and 'Witch number one, drown in / a river! Witch number two, gotta noose to give her! / Witch number three...'.<sup>21</sup> This happy little ditty troubles both the family's relationship to Salem, in that the punishments for witchcraft vary from the hanging that was the fate of Salem's accused to European methods of witch detection and punishment, and Modesty's own relationship to witchcraft, for her song is not only about how witches will be punished but about her family relationship to them: 'My momma, your momma'. As such, while the movie has not cast Mary-Lou as the stepmother as early as the printed script, Modesty (and the 'you' being addressed in her song) is troubled in their relation to both Mary-Lou and witchcraft in that 'my momma' is clearly a witch.

As it turns out, both Modesty and Credence are later presented as witches: Modesty in her repudiation of the anti-magic leaflets that she, her siblings, and other children have been recruited to distribute and the later discovery of a wand under her bed, and Credence when he is revealed as the Obscurus terrorising New York throughout the movie. Credence is perhaps the most interesting presentation of a liminality of child/adult status and of witchcraft in this movie. Despite the stage directions of the screenplay and, much later, Tina's statement that 'He is not a child', Credence's status throughout the movie troubles such claims.<sup>22</sup> He is presented throughout in a dependent relationship with adults, as the child of Mary-Lou in which role he is beaten and forced into upholding the Second Salemers' witch-hunts, and in his relationship with Percival Graves, the

head of law enforcement at the American magical organisation, MACUSA, who alternately threatens and wheedles him into trying to find a child Graves has seen close to Mary-Lou in a vision, about whom he tells Credence: 'Find the child and we will all be free'.<sup>23</sup> Both of these figures act *in loco parentis*, but this is a parenthood based entirely on the selfish desires of the adult and the resultant manipulation and abuse of the child. Neither have any interest in Credence beyond what he can do to advance their respective ideologies, and in Mary-Lou's insistence that witchcraft is evil, coupled with Graves' assumption that Credence is a squib (a non-magic child of magical parents, with the heredity of magic therefore naturalised), along with further abuse from Senator Shaw who calls him 'freak' and tells him that he and his family belong 'in the trash', the two create something that is both Credence and beyond him: the Obscurus.<sup>24</sup> Readers/viewers of the *Harry Potter* series will already understand what Newt tells to Jacob: that the Obscurus is created when 'young wizards and witches sometimes tried to suppress their magic to avoid persecution', with Tina explaining further that 'It's an unstable, uncontrollable dark force that busts out and—and attacks ... and then vanishes...' (Albus Dumbledore's sister, Ariana, died of such a fate after being teased by Muggle children).<sup>25</sup> As such, despite the further claim that children with Obscurus tend to die by the age of 10, Credence both bucks the trend in that he is situated elsewhere as adult, and that even in his status as child, he is not the right child: too old to have an Obscurus and live, too old for the child that Graves is looking for, but still young enough to be treated as a child by everyone.

Portrayals of Credence as the Obscurus also work to place him in the liminal space and situate the adolescent body within previously read portrayals of the leaky body. For Credence is not just between adulthood and childhood in the language of others and in his problematic relationships to the other characters, but in the sense that his body is subject to explosive and non-linear change. The stage directions in the screenplay describes him as Obscurus thus: 'As [Mary Lou] moves, an almighty force explodes into her; a bestial screeching mass that consumes her'.<sup>26</sup> This description is interesting in many ways, firstly because I have struggled myself to put language to the visual appearance of the Obscurus on screen: the best I can do is ropes of black, like thick spiderwebs, interspersed with outbreaks of fire, moving at speed, and constantly breaking apart and reforming, changing in shape and size. But that does not really do justice to it either; so let us consider the stage directions instead. The Obscurus is 'a mighty



force', one that 'explodes into her' and 'consumes her': as such the divide between the bodies of Credence/Obscurus and Mary Lou are broken, with the son-figure moving 'into' her while simultaneously consuming her. As such, Credence both penetrates and envelops the mother-body, eventually leaving it 'lifeless' and scarred, though apparently her own once more.<sup>27</sup> Further, Credence's eventual fate in the movie, killed by Aurors until he 'finally seems to implode' until '[o]nly small tatters of black matter are left—floating through the air like feathers', again places Credence—who has been simultaneously present both in his human form and that of the Obscurus throughout this scene—in a subservient relationship with abusive adults, who kill him for what they have forced him to become and for his still childish inability to control himself.<sup>28</sup> Finally, at the point of death, his leaky adolescent body—one formed by this lack of control in its very formlessness—can be pinned down and known, even if only as something it is not: 'like feathers'. It is posited as a form of freedom in the ability to fly away, but it is a freedom bought at the cost of his body and his life.

While this story focuses on children not drawn from the historical events of 1692, their portrayal can still inform a cultural understanding of Salem's children. Modesty and Credence are both innocent and guilty, depending on the adult perspective; likewise they and their sister Chastity trouble the boundaries between adult and child, with Credence's status in particular up for grabs depending on the perspective of apparently unproblematically adult characters within the movie and on the divide between the visual experience of the movie and the language of the stage directions in the printed screenplay. Further, they reflect the leaky family in Salem, composed not of the traditional parents and biological children but of a family that shifts and changes throughout the action; but despite this leakiness, the assumed passing on of the witchcraft 'gene' from mother to child is assured, with even the possibility of the squib showing as an anomaly. And in Credence's status as 'freak' to both the non-magic community and the magical adults who use him and finally kill him lies the problem with the child/adolescent: in their inability to pin him down and his continual status as 'other', the only recourse—as with Abigail Hobbs—is to dispose of him altogether. The fate of Modesty and Chastity is never disclosed: like the majority of Salem's accused children, they are not deemed important enough to discuss. In relating this work to the Salem witch trials, then, the children are both central and peripheral, 'freaks' and an

integral part of the community, dangerous to others but of little account in and of themselves; guilty and innocent.

### SEX AND SALEM

Thus far in this work, only a little has needed to be said about the relationship between sex and witchcraft found frequently in accounts of European witch trials or in non-Salem fiction and movies in which witches and other supernatural beings figure prominently. While works such as the *Malleus* frequently focus on the sexual activity of witches, with claims to witches causing impotence, seducing otherwise righteous men, and having sex with the Devil, there were very few accusations of sexual activity between Salem's adult witches and the Devil or his minions or amongst themselves at their meetings. Indeed, even those sexually related accusations that exist were comparatively tame: William Allen testified that Sarah Good appeared to him in his chamber but all she did was to sit on his foot; similarly, Bernard Peach claimed that Susannah Martin came in through his window when he was in bed and 'Lay vpon him about an hour & half or 2 hours' during which time he was unable to move.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, there is no suggestion that this breaking into a man's bedroom resulted in any sexual activity: one imagines that these men either lacked the imagination to describe such an event or were too worried about what such tales might say about their own proclivities. Further, although there were frequent accounts of sexual activity between children and/or devilish beings in European witch trials, Salem's children did not report any such activity, and such accusations were not made by either children or adults, no matter what other deviance they might accuse their neighbours of.

But this is not the case in some fictions of the trials in which Salem's children appear, although this is rarely predicated on sexual relations of the Satanic kind but on those between Salem's adults and the afflicted girls. The best-known (but by no means only example) is, of course, *The Crucible*, in which the historical Abigail Williams' age has been raised from 12 to 17 'for dramatic purposes': in raising Abigail's age, the assumption could be that the 'dramatic purpose' of such a move would be to suggest that 17 is a more acceptable age for sexual activity than 12, yet this is not necessarily borne out by the text. As with Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts*, there are variations between Miller's script and various productions of the play, with his internal notes and stage directions providing extra detail that may not be apparent on stage or screen or that have been discarded or

reimagined as each director produces his/her own vision of the story. However, as there are many screen versions of the play, I will be focusing on the script.

Miller's text, whatever it was intended or has been read to represent beyond the events of Salem in 1692, explores the relationships between adults and children at some length and, as with the trial records and histories, we frequently come up against the question of what a child is or should be. In the textual notes on Samuel Parris, Miller writes:

[Samuel Parris] was a widower with no interest in children. He regarded them as young adults, and until this strange crisis he, like the rest of Salem, never conceived that the children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak.<sup>30</sup>

As such, Miller presents an image of the ideal Puritan child, one that he claims preceded the crisis and one predicated on the child's silence and straightness, under the patriarchal auspices of what is 'permitted' and with the child apparently 'thankful' for it. Yet this is troubled from the outset by Parris' point of view: '[h]e regarded them' and 'never conceived'; with this ideal Puritan child therefore one that only ever exists under the adult gaze and worldview, and even this is soon shattered by 'this strange crisis'. There is also a tension between Parris' claimed lack of 'interest' in children and that he still 'regarded' and 'conceived' of them in a certain way. Likewise, their very status as children is troubled in that Parris 'regarded them as young adults': as such, Miller both divides children from adults and troubles any such divide.

Such tensions between the status of the child and adult in this work are explored further in the sexual relationship between Proctor and Williams. In his stage directions, Miller constructs such a relationship in terms of Proctor's sin and, therefore, his responsibility: 'He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own fashion of decent conduct'.<sup>31</sup> As such, the nature of the sin is not confined to a single designation and can therefore be interpreted as a sexual relationship outside of marriage as much as with a girl described by Miller previously as 'a strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling'.<sup>32</sup> Yet Proctor also appears to have the capacity to lead others into sin, either deliberately or by his very presence: berating his servant, Mary Warren, for leaving the house, he says: 'I'll show you a great doin' on your

arse one of these days', to which the stage direction for Mercy Lewis directs that she is 'both afraid of him and strangely titillated'.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Proctor's sins do not cancel out Abigail's, with Miller troubling such binary responsibility by portraying Abigail as sexually forward. The stage directions say: 'Winningly she comes a little closer, with a confidential, wicked air', and although Proctor admits to a previous relationship with her, while attempting to put it behind him, claiming: 'That's done with', Abigail says: 'John—I am waitin' for you every night'.<sup>34</sup> In attempting to keep a distance between them and in response to Abigail's tears, Proctor '(gently pressing her from him, with great sympathy but firmly)' says: 'Child—', to which Abigail responds '(with a flash of anger): How do you call me child!' As such, the prior sexual relationship between them and Abigail's desire for its resumption—and, perhaps, at least some of the claim to sin therein—is based on the question of whether Abigail is a child: Proctor's calling her a child predicates a far greater sin in his sexual relationship with her (at a point when she was, surely, even younger), while her repudiation of the child's status both attempts to establish her as a sexually available adult woman and again raises the question of language in the claim to 'call'. This question of Abigail's precarious child-adult status continues through the text, particularly in an exchange in which Proctor denounces others' claims to her as child: 'Danforth (pointing at Abigail, incredulously): "This child would murder your wife?" Proctor: "It is not a child. [...] Mr. Parris discovered them himself in the dead of night! There's the 'child' she is!"'<sup>35</sup> He also denies her humanity in calling her 'it' and denounces her for her sexuality: 'It is a whore! [...] I have known her, sir. I have known her. [...] It is a whore's vengeance'.<sup>36</sup>

While discussing the sexualisation of Abigail in this text, it is also worth remembering that Proctor is equally sexualised, a trope that is also used in other fictions of Salem such as Clapp's *Witches' Children*, in which Mary Warren fantasises about a sexual relationship with Proctor: 'I found my healthy, eager, developing body responding to John Proctor's maleness'.<sup>37</sup> While we can only guess at the reasons why Proctor should be so singled out, and his age—like Abigail's—accordingly changed from the historical 60 in 1692 to 'middle thirties' in *The Crucible* and his construction as 'tall, straight and ruggedly handsome' in Clapp's *Witches' Children*, these narratives appear to be constructing a more conventional sexual relationship between man and woman while also troubling it as inappropriate in both cases, through Proctor's status as married and in relation to the ages of the

afflicted girls who take their revenge for his lack of interest through the courts to his eventual hanging.<sup>38</sup>

But if Proctor seems an unlikely candidate for this kind of fictionalisation, is not Abigail Williams even more so, especially given she exits Salem's historical trials relatively early? One possible explanation is Miller's explanation for this exit: that she and Mercy Lewis stole from Parris and ran away and, in the problematically genred postscript, 'Echoes Down the Corridor', he claims: 'The legend has it that Abigail turned up later as a prostitute in Boston'.<sup>39</sup> Yet repeating this quasi-historical gossip does not necessarily justify the sexualisation of Abigail in that prostitution is rarely about sex but about women's survival, especially in times of limited opportunities outside of marriage and beneath the scandal and damage to her reputation that the fictional Abigail (at least) suffered. This is not to argue that there is no correlation at all between childhood and sexuality, taboo though that subject frequently is; European witch trials have already shown that this is not the case and Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* trouble this still further. Rather, narratives such as these—and some historical accounts, such as Starkey's and Hansen's—have both introduced an element of sex to Salem's story that is not apparent from the court records in order to tell a different story—albeit one that, again, both demonises the afflicted girls as aberrant in their precocious sexuality, according to the narratives' position—and attempts to explain their actions and label them as guilty. Perhaps, as the Commentary to Miller's play claims, 'It was the uncompromising moral absolutism of that era's Puritans that Miller wished to capture and expose'.<sup>40</sup> So why sexualise the afflicted girls in fiction when the historical records make no such claims? Perhaps because sex sells: anyone who has seen Netflix's three-season series *Salem* will see that its reliance on depictions of sexual activity, along with portraying Salem's story as a horror (though, in many respects, it was, although not in terms of the supernatural goings-on that take place in this version of the story) was designed to be a large part of its appeal. Yet sex in these texts is also about undermining and/or troubling childhood innocence, but an innocence which has to be assumed as a given and as prior in order to effect that very undermining. The afflicted girls are evil because of their actions, but actions that are predicated on a sexual precocity that makes them children in the very claim to precocity but also adults in their sexuality, one that should not—cannot—belong to a child.

## CHILDREN AND POWER

The final trope I wish to explore in this chapter regarding the fictionalisation of Salem is that of children and power. While we have already considered the sexualisation of the quasi-child and its relationship with the unproblematically (in the texts' own terms) adult males in these fictional texts, the troubling of each of these text's children *as* children is also predicated on assigning a power to that child that, it is assumed, she (most frequently the female child) should not have. In *The Crucible*, for example, it is in rejecting Abigail's chosen and experienced status as a sexual adult that Proctor seals his own fate, and it is only as her evidence sends him to the gallows that Proctor finally and bitterly accepts her as an adult; as such, Abigail has the power to destroy the adult and take her own place *as* adult through her actions. This power of destruction is one also considered elsewhere in this text, and it is a power to be afraid of in that it upsets the patriarchal order of society: that these girls have the power to fool grown men. Miller's Francis Nurse, pleading in court for his wife, Rebecca, states to Judge Danforth: 'The girls, sir, the girls are frauds. [...] We have proof of it, sir. They are all deceiving you'.<sup>41</sup> Despite Nurse's reiteration of his claim to a deception from the afflicted girls, he does not detail the extent or content of this deception, and neither do judges Danforth and Hathorne ask, relying instead on their status to justify their decisions to arrest Rebecca and others. As such, an opportunity to question the truthfulness of the girls is missed, while their power over those who are supposed to be powerful in Salem society is further assured, even while it is exposed to the audience/reader, at least.

Power in Adriana Mather's *How to Hang a Witch* is presented somewhat differently in that the power relations are almost entirely confined to the young, modern-day descendants of the accused, and the afflicted girls in the revenant shape of Ann Putnam Jr. The power of the Descendants—capitalised and named as a group and in terms of their links to the accused witches of 1692—rests largely on what appears to be illusion: on dressing in black, on their status within the school community, and on the rumour that 'they can curse you if they want to'.<sup>42</sup> And to Samantha Mather, the new girl in school, their power is more than a sleight of hand: as in 1692 Salem, majority opinion holds sway, allowing the Goth-clad teenagers free reign to emotionally and physically torment Samantha with no retribution from those figured as adults: parents and teachers.

Yet, it appears, Samantha has power of her own through her ancestry and her name, even if it is a power that she did not ask for and cannot control, and one that is linked to the ancestry and names of her tormentors who are all named after their hanged ancestors: 'It's tradition. Our families have done it for generations', claims a teenage Susannah Martin.<sup>43</sup> And it is in the coming together of these descendants, Samantha included, that family members in modern-day Salem begin to die. But names also have power to bring back the dead, as Samantha's ghostly friend Elijah attests, twice claiming 'Names have power', thus relating back to the magical tradition that anyone who knows your true name can control you.<sup>44</sup> Speaking the name of Elijah's former fiancée does indeed bring her back, transforming Samantha's stepmother, Vivian, into Ann Putnam Jr., and in that transformation from adult to (again reimagined in terms of age and therefore problematically situated) child, Ann regains a power predicated on the existence of the supernatural and her control of it. After all, as in many YA novels, witches are real in this text in the sense of an ability to perform spells that bring back ghosts of the dead: Samantha and the Descendants raise ghostly spectres of their hanged ancestors while attempting 'a clarity spell', and Samantha stops her friends being hanged by Ann by unleashing a mental power to affect physical objects, to which Vivian/Ann comments: 'I guess you are my daughter in some ways', thus disturbing the adopted-mother trope situated as difference as presented in *Fantastic Beasts* and other texts.<sup>45</sup> As such, while the children in this novel appear to be the ones with the power—to harm each other and to harm the town more widely—it is a power, yet again, that is predicated on an understanding of the family in which witchcraft is passed from one generation to the next and is therefore, of course, real.

### THE CHILD AS FICTION

In considering each of these stories of Salem, presented as they are through different (and frequently unstable) genres, set in different times, and with different purposes, the common thread between them and the reason I have chosen them for consideration is that of the child. Yet, what is the benefit to choosing to consider Salem's children through fiction at all in a work that is attempting to analyse how the historical children have been presented in narratives of the trials? Perhaps the principal driver behind such an approach is that, in the unsettling of the historical child through the reading of narratives including court documents, contemporary works,

and histories, we can already see that the child is only available to us not just through, but as, text: there is no knowable and retrievable child waiting for us at the end of the process. As such, Salem's children are always formed in and from cultural memory, and what we know about them—what we think we know about them—is always a construction based on a multitude of texts and readings: not just our own, but those undertaken by previous historians, dramatists, poets, and others. In other words, the child is always a fiction, one that—as Miller claims—may have been drawn from historical events, but one who, at the end of the day, is always a fictional construction that is entirely our own.

## NOTES

1. Howe, *The Daughters of Temperance Hobbs*, inside back cover.
2. Kathleen Benner Duble, *The Sacrifice* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2005).
3. Deborah Harkness, *A Discovery of Witches* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2011).
4. Miller, 'Why I wrote *The Crucible*', *The New Yorker* <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/10/21/why-i-wrote-the-crucible> [accessed 3 March 2020].
5. Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 3.
6. Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 3.
7. Adriana Mather, p. 352.
8. Adriana Mather, unnumbered.
9. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 128.
10. Hawthorne, p. 57.
11. Hawthorne, p. 103.
12. Hawthorne, p. 104.
13. Hawthorne, p. 108.
14. Hawthorne, p. 127.
15. Hawthorne, pp. 248–249.
16. J. K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. This analysis will focus on the movie as far as possible, although page numbers will be given for the screenplay to aid discussion and stage directions from the screenplay will be compared to the movie where relevant.
17. Rowling (2016) *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: The Original Screenplay* (London: Sphere, 2018), pp. 9, 11.
18. Rowling, p. 12.
19. Rowling, p. 13.
20. Rowling, p. 204.
21. Rowling, pp. 52, 54, 155.



22. Rowling, p. 238.
23. Rowling, p. 89.
24. Rowling, pp. 75–76.
25. Rowling, pp. 150–151.
26. Rowling, p. 205.
27. Rowling, p. 206.
28. Rowling, p. 255.
29. Rosenthal et al., pp. 141, 256.
30. Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 5.
31. Miller, p. 21.
32. Miller, p. 10.
33. Miller, p. 21.
34. Miller, p. 22.
35. Miller, p. 95.
36. Miller, p. 100.
37. Clapp, p. 12.
38. Miller, p. 20; Clapp, p. 22.
39. Miller, p. 137.
40. Miller, p. xxvi.
41. Miller, p. 79.
42. Adriana Mather, p. 16.
43. Adriana Mather, p. 95.
44. Adriana Mather, pp. 244, 272.
45. Adriana Mather, pp. 268, 339.



## CHAPTER 8

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# Endings and Echoes

### THE END OF THE AFFAIR

Claiming an end to the Salem witch episode is no less troubling than pinning down its beginnings has proven to be. The history of the trials and their aftermath is well-known; at least, as far as it can ever be known. Scepticism existed from early in the process. Brattle, Rev. Samuel Willard of Boston, and even Increase Mather wrote against issues including the admission of spectral evidence and the veracity of the accusers' testimonies while the trials were still ongoing. Hoffer reports further: 'Men of parts like former governor Simon Bradstreet, [Thomas] Danforth, Increase Mather, and Willard spoke out against the conduct of the trials. Even in Salem, there were many who quietly opposed the whole affair'.<sup>1</sup> They were not to stay quiet for long: in October 1692, villagers including John Osgood and eight others approached the General Court to allow their families and the imprisoned children of those already condemned or executed to be allowed home 'under bond' before winter hit, with its particular impact on the youngest and oldest prisoners, each of whom was detained without adequate clothing, food, or heat. By October 12, Governor William Phips forbade any further imprisonment for witchcraft, and 10 days later he suspended the court of Oyer and Terminer. The final trials took place on January 3, 1693, under the Superior Court of Judicature: 31 were accused, and all but three ended in acquittal, with those found guilty later reprieved. The last witches were ordered released

in May 1693, upon payment of their prison fees. In a letter to the Earl of Nottingham, dated February 21, 1693, Phips wrote:

When I put an end to the Court there ware at least fifty persons in prison in great misery by reason of the extream cold and their poverty, most of them having only spectre evidence against them and their mittimusses being defective, I caused some of them to be lettout upon bayle and put the Judges upon consideration of a way to reliefe others and to prevent them from perishing in prison.<sup>2</sup>

However, this proved to be so many empty words, given that accused witches continued to be held in prison—and even to die—due to non-payment of fees (their assets having been seized) until some three months later.

Yet at least some of those in positions of power during the trials became uncomfortable enough to repent their roles publicly. Five years after the end of the trials, Judge Samuel Sewall stood up in Boston's South Church to admit his responsibility, claiming that the 'Guilt' he had 'contracted, upon the opening of the late Commission of Oyer & Terminer at Salem' had resulted in 'the reiterated strokes of God upon himself and his family'. As such, 'he Desires to take the Blame and Shame of it' and asks that God 'would pardon that Sin, and all his other Sins'.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Calef recounts the signed paper from 12 of the trials' jurors, claiming that 'we our selves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand the mysterious delusions of the Powers of Darkness, and Prince of the Air', and that 'we fear we have been instrumental with others, tho Ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon our selves [...] the Guilt of Innocent Blood'. Further, they claimed:

We do therefore hereby signifie to all in general (and to the surviving Sufferers in especial) our deep sense of, and sorrow for our Errors, in acting on such Evidence to the condemning of any person. And do hereby declare that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken, for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds; and do therefore humbly beg forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

Both of these documents appear to speak of both guilt and shame, with the public shaming experienced by Hawthorne's fictional Hester replaced by one seemingly undertaken voluntarily, although there is little doubt that the tide had turned against those held responsible for the trials

sufficiently for this kind of public abasement to be of value both to their political and their personal selves. Yet, surely this should have been the end of the affair if adult men in positions of power proclaim their own guilt. But this was not the case, especially as the jurors claimed delusion and ‘acting on such evidence’; as such, they laid at least some of the guilt on those giving evidence and deluding them: the afflicted girls. Further, John Hale’s posthumous apology appeared as part of his account in 1702, in which he claimed: ‘And what grief of heart it brings to a tender conscience to have been unwittingly encouraging of the Sufferings of the innocent’; given he also noted that ‘I have special reasons moving me to bear my testimony about these matters, before I go hence and be no more’, his words take on something of the death-bed confession.<sup>5</sup> Like the jurors before him, however, his apology was half-hearted at best, claiming sorrow but no legal responsibility in that he was ‘unwittingly’ participating in the persecution of the innocent, whereas the jurors were ‘deluded’. Only Sewall took true responsibility, no matter that it was to protect his family from what he saw as further instances of God’s anger: on the day of his repentance, he began to wear a hair shirt under his clothes which, according to legend, he wore for the rest of his life.

Even this apparent ending was subject to a lengthy subsequent legal process in which families of accused and convicted witches petitioned for financial compensation and the clearing of their names for many years following the trials. In many cases, the personal property had been seized, both within the bounds of the law and outside it; very little of this was returned to claimants. The process dragged on: as Hoffer claims, the children of George Burroughs were still filing petitions for financial redress of their losses as late as 1750.<sup>6</sup> Further, the ongoing impact was both financial and personal: at least two of the accused were too poor to pay for their release and had to sell themselves into indentured service; more returned home to penury, with their home and possessions still subject to their previous and often illegal confiscation; further, a pardon in such terms that were offered was unable to constitute closure for most of those accused, and some even died before their pardon came through. The status of a ‘pardon’ must also be considered. According to a modern-day legal dictionary: ‘The granting of a pardon to a person who has committed a crime or who has been convicted of a crime is an act of clemency, which forgives the wrongdoer and restores the person’s civil rights’.<sup>7</sup> A pardon does not admit to wrongful arrest, but to ‘an act of clemency’ in which the accused’s status as ‘wrongdoer’ remains intact: there is no sense here of an admission

of specific wrongdoing on the part of those who imprisoned the ‘confessed’ witches or of a returned or admitted innocence of the accused. While the executed witches—those who maintained their innocence—have finally been exonerated, those who confessed remain under a shadow, with their ‘innocence’ still troubled, still subject to a legal ruling that, by its very nature, maintains their guilt, including all of Salem’s children. Yet the legal aspect of the episode appears to have—finally—come to an end with a few small but significant incidents in more recent years. In 1957, a Massachusetts state resolution cleared the name of Ann Pudeator and ‘certain other persons’ who were unlisted. On Halloween 2001, Bridget Bishop, Susannah Martin, Alice Parker, Wilmot Redd, and Margaret Scott were officially exonerated by the state, although the choice of date still troubled their status as witches even while it appeared to settle the matter. And in July 2017, the location of the hangings in modern-day Danvers was officially designated as Proctor’s Ledge—a short distance from the previously assumed Gallows Hill—and marked by a memorial.

The dedicated work of many historians has resulted in what is perhaps a surprising amount of information on what happened to Salem’s children in the wake of the trials. In terms of the afflicted girls, the best-known example is that of Ann Putnam Jr. who—like Hale, Sewall, and the jurors—was famously moved to apologise for her role in the trials. Her parents had died within two weeks of each other in 1699, leaving Ann in charge of her younger siblings in what Upham describes as ‘the most melancholy orphanage’; at least eight survived her.<sup>8</sup> On August 25, 1706, the still-unmarried Ann wished to become a full member of Salem’s church, now presided over by the Reverend Joseph Green; but in order to do so, she needed to confront the events of 1692. What has been repeatedly figured as Ann’s ‘confession’ by Upham and others reads thus:

I desire to be humbled before God for that sad and humbling providence that befell my father’s family in the year about ’92; that I, then being in my childhood, should, by such a providence of God, be made an instrument for the accusing of several persons of a grievous crime, whereby their lives were taken away from them, whom now I have just grounds and good reason to believe they were innocent persons; and that it was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time, whereby I justly fear I have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon myself and this land the guilt of innocent blood; though what was said or done by me against any person I can truly and uprightly say, before God and

man, I did it not out of any anger, malice, or ill-will to any person, for I had no such thing against one of them; but what I did was ignorantly, being deluded by Satan. And particularly, as I was a chief instrument of accusing of Goodwife Nurse and her two sisters, I desire to lie in the dust, and to be humbled for it, in that I was a cause, with others, of so sad a calamity to them and their families; for which cause I desire to lie in the dust, and earnestly beg forgiveness of God, and from all those unto whom I have given just cause of sorrow and offence, whose relations were taken away or accused.<sup>9</sup>

While there may be some value in an analysis of the language of this confession, it has already been stated that much of what appears to be Ann's wording was fairly standard: in a repetition of the written accusations made on her behalf by her father Thomas some 14 years before, Ann's written testimony was written by a patriarchal figure who standardised his language according to the occasion. Thus, while historians such as Rosenthal claim that '[h]er words acknowledge that in some way she had been an instrument of Satan', he also considers more carefully what such a claim might mean in terms of a more extensive reading of her role in the trials in which he judges her as both 'dissembling' and perpetuating 'fraudulent charges'.<sup>10</sup> Hill also considers Ann's confession, but in terms of what she may have remembered or felt:

In her dreams she may have seen faces filled with terror or bodies swinging from branches or a masked man slicing through a rope with a knife. In her waking hours she must have recalled the screaming and falling and fainting. [...] But whatever she had remembered or forgotten, she seems to have felt true regret.<sup>11</sup>

Ann died at the age of 36 in Salem after years of ill health, of which Upham remarked: 'Her confession, profession, and death point the moral'.<sup>12</sup> As such, while Ann has received qualified redemption from some historians in that either her actions were attributed to forces (social and diabolical) beyond her control or were due to what Hill figures as 'mere childish dislike'—the child therefore positioned as out of its own and others' control—Upham's final analysis is that her early death was no more than she deserved.

We also know a surprising amount of what happened to another of the earliest afflicted girls, given her early exit from the trial proceedings. According to significant research from Marilynne K. Roach, Betty Parris'

last appearance in the trial narrative was recorded by Lawson who placed her at Martha Corey's examination on March 21; soon afterwards, she was sent away from the Parris parsonage in late April 1692 to the household of Samuel Sewall, a brother of the Salem trial judge. While she returned home that autumn, the Parris family's tenure was already more tenuous than it had ever been, and in 1697, the family moved first to Stow, then Newton, and then Watertown. At the age of 27, Betty married Benjamin Barron and set up a household in Concord, Mass., and had three children. She died, aged 78, on March 21, 1760.<sup>13</sup>

Schiff comments on the wider fate of the afflicted girls in seeking a conclusion to the trials:

Roughly half of the afflicted girls grew up, found husbands, and had children, if not necessarily in that order. Betty Parris married late and raised a family in Concord. No trace remains of her cousin Abigail, the exuberant witch hunter. She may have been the girl reported to have experienced 'diabolical molestations to her death' and who died, still single, in 1697. Like Ann Putnam, Susannah Sheldon failed to marry, highly uncommon in seventeenth-century New England. She wound up in Rhode Island charged as a 'person of evil fame', which was more common. [...] Mercy Lewis, the Putnams' maid, bore an illegitimate child; she later married and moved to Boston. Mary Walcott, Abigail Hobbs, and Mary Lacey Jr. raised their families the old-fashioned way, several of them in the immediate area.<sup>14</sup>

As we can see, opinion on the afflicted girls has shifted with time from their status as innocent victims to a focus on the 'bad end' that a few of them came to, according to the reversal of an attainder of 1711, which claimed: 'Some of the principal Accusers and Witnesses in those dark and severe prosecutions have discovered themselves to be persons of profligate and vicious Conversation'; a judgement based on sexual morality and the proper roles not just of a Puritan child but of a Puritan woman.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Schiff's analysis focuses primarily on both a lack and an excess of what is therefore deemed a proper sexuality in her claims that both Ann Putnam and Susannah Sheldon 'failed to marry' and that Mercy Lewis 'bore an illegitimate child': in each case, their sexuality or their lack of sexual appeal to others is construed against what she calls 'the old-fashioned way' in which adulthood meant marriage and legitimately born children. Hite, too, claims: 'In general, acting as an accuser in 1692 appears to have hurt a young person's marriage prospects more than being accused did, but the

sampling is too small to draw definitive conclusions'.<sup>16</sup> As such, these problematically situated afflicted children have been allowed to move into adulthood in a way that Dorcas/Dorothy Good never could, but their adulthood is as aberrant as their childhood, albeit more sexually charged in the analyses of modern historians.

On the other side of the assumed accuser/accused binary, Hite comments more on the fates of the accused children than most historians due to his focus on Andover's story. In his appendix on the accused witches, he notes, variously, that the two Barker cousins married each other in 1704, with William dying in 1745 and Mary in 1752; that both Sarah and Mary Bridges lived until adulthood and married, although the death dates of both are unknown; that the Carrier children all went on to marry, with Sarah perhaps 'the last living person accused of witchcraft in 1692' as she died in 1772; and records the fates of many others.<sup>17</sup> But not all of Salem's children grew up. Sarah Good's baby daughter, Mercy, was born and died in prison; the infant child of Elizabeth Scargen died in prison too. Mercy's four-year-old sister, Dorcas/Dorothy, lived to adulthood, at least, but her time in prison had left her insane. Margaret Toothaker survived Salem's prison only to be captured by Native Americans on a raid on her home in Billerica on August 5, 1695. Her mother was killed (her father having died an accused witch in Salem's prison); Margaret was never seen again.<sup>18</sup> Accusing Andover girl, Rose Foster, died aged 13 in February 1693, barely outliving the trials.<sup>19</sup> While such comments may appear to focus unduly on marriages, children, and deaths in much the same way as a commentary on the afflicted as adults, it is these record entries that constitute our principal window into the afterlives of both the accused and the afflicted children.

Given this ability to follow so many of those children involved in Salem's witch trials to their inevitable deaths we might claim that, with Sarah Carrier's death towards the end of the eighteenth century, the trials were truly over. Yet even now, can we say with any confidence that they have really come to an end? With the trials, their aftermath, and their commemoration such an integral part of Salem town that the city's police force has the emblem of a witch on its cars, and with the place flooded to capacity with witch-fans and self-professed witches at Halloween, the story of Salem's 'witches' seems far from over; even if the narrative has shifted across the centuries from one in which witchcraft was real, through the long process of proving innocence, to one where those accused and killed in Salem in 1692 are, once again, 'witches' with the approval of the town



(although Danvers, once Salem Village, has resisted any such profiting from its tragic past). As such, Salem's witch panic, and the involvement of its accusing and accused children, is still ongoing; and a major part of that is through its narratives.

### SALEM AND CHILDHOOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Of course, neither witch accusations nor the correlation of witchcraft with childhood ended in Salem or even in writings about the events of 1692. Post-1692 trials in Massachusetts include the Hartford case of August 1697, about which Calef tells us how

one Mistress Benom was tried for witchcraft, she was accused by some Children that pretended to the Spectral sight [...] Upon her Tryal nothing material appearing against her, save Spectre Evidence, she was acquitted, as also her Daughter, a Girl of Twelve or Thirteen Years old, who had been likewise accused.<sup>20</sup>

This case contains many echoes of Salem, even if on a much smaller scale, as Salem echoed and expanded the Goodwin case before it: young girls accused an older woman of tormenting them by sending her shape out to harm them, and her own child was also accused, with the motifs of family and heredity, and both the guilt and innocence of what appears to be two opposing groups of children up for grabs.

More recent examples that both claim and trouble the innocence of children are not necessarily about witchcraft at all: for example, they have been evident in instances of mass child abuse accusations in the US during the twentieth century, as discussed in Richard Beck's text, *We Believe the Children*. Beck and those he is discussing specifically link such cases to the Salem trials. He comments:

People who think they are being wrongly persecuted by the legal system will often compare themselves to the Puritans who were accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. Those accused in the day care cases were no exception. In Manhattan Beach the defendants' supporters ran newspaper ads reading, simply, "SALEM MASSACHUSETTS, 1692. MANHATTAN BEACH CALIFORNIA, 1985".<sup>21</sup>

This text (which, interestingly, I first came across in the bookstore of the Salem Witch Museum in 2019) draws further parallels between Salem and an outbreak of accusations of child abuse against day-care staff. However, two points in particular suggest themselves: the first is that there is an assumption of childhood innocence here that is immediately undermined in the assumed innocence of the accused adults, in that (as is discussed in Beck's wider text) the accusations made against them were both false and, at least in some cases, were assumed to have been made with some understanding from the child of possible consequences to its accusations; and secondly, that once again the link with Salem is predicated on the uneasy relationship between childhood, adulthood, and language, in which the child's status as child is frequently under question.<sup>22</sup> Further, although (as already discussed) sex was not a common trope relating to either children or adults in the Salem trials, such claims still have their roots in European witch trials. As Wolfgang Behringer asks: '[W]hat about the allegations against their seducers? What about mothers or aunts, whom they accused of having introduced them to the devil, with whom they had sex on several occasions at the witches' sabbat, but first at home or in the neighbour's flat? Some of these narratives are similar to those found in present-day cases of child abuse.'<sup>23</sup>

Although the stakes of the argument may have moved on, at least somewhat, the American belief in witches did not end with the cataclysmic events of Salem in 1692; while many are tempted to dismiss such beliefs as an aberration, or as evidence of the unsophisticated nature of Puritan New England, these beliefs have continued in some form well beyond the late-seventeenth century. While no further witches were hanged in North America after 1692, a fear of witches and the resultant accusations against those suspected have continued. Owen Davies, in his exploration into witchcraft in America post-Salem, writes: '[T]he accumulating weight of press reports regarding witchcraft from the mid-nineteenth century onwards generated a growing realization that the antiquarians had got it wrong. Witchcraft was an ongoing problem and not a matter of legend.'<sup>24</sup> As Davies explains further, such accusations took place across America, often for political reasons or to stigmatise a certain group—for example, they were used by white Americans to claim racial superiority over Native Americans and African Americans who were stigmatised by their practice of ritual and Voodoo—or as a reflection of turbulent social and political times. Yet each of these periods of belief is characterised by its

‘accusations’: as in Salem, a belief in witches was always a belief in the threatening ‘other’ and the need for its expulsion.

In North America, the self-claimed witch population has risen in recent years. According to Alex Mar’s *Witches of America*, most people who identify as witches today are either Pagans or Wiccans, interrelated movements exported from the UK in the 1960s. Mar states: ‘Entire networks of tens of thousands of witches multiplied, connected, and fused into covens in cities and suburbs across the country.’<sup>25</sup> Kristen J. Sollée, author of *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*, discusses the crafting of the feminist community within the coven, invoking witch-collectives focused on activism, the arts, and reclaiming the language of witchcraft for women’s power rather than their abuse.<sup>26</sup> After all, the witch in western society continues to exist primarily through her invocation in political and socio-political language, both for good and for bad. The inauguration of President Trump provoked women’s protest marches around the world, with some banners reading: ‘Hex the Patriarchy’; ‘Witches for Black Lives’; and ‘We are the daughters of the witches you didn’t burn, and we are pissed off’. An event took place October 2018 in Brooklyn, New York, to hex supreme court justice, Brett Kavanaugh; the meeting was sold out, and the protest made headlines across the world. It is no surprise that, at a time when women’s rights are under increasing pressure in some areas of western society, the witch should have become a feminist symbol of power, both in language and in the claimed reality of witchcraft.<sup>27</sup>

However, others are also fighting to channel the power of the witch. Trump has repeatedly stated that the 2016 investigation into his alleged collusion with Russia was ‘the biggest witch hunt of a politician in American history’; according to *The New York Times*, Trump used the term ‘witch hunt’, with himself as victim, in tweets more than 110 times in the period May 2017–2018; at the time of writing, when Nancy Pelosi has called for his impeachment, he has claimed it yet again. Further, the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements led Woody Allen to invoke the spectre of Salem, but with men as accused witches, commenting: ‘You also don’t want it to lead to a witch hunt atmosphere, a Salem atmosphere, where every guy in an office who winks at a woman is suddenly having to call a lawyer to defend himself’.<sup>28</sup> In these cases, men are positioning themselves and their peers in the role of witches, but this witch is innocent, a victim: it denies its own status as a witch, using the power associated with claims to victimhood as a weapon against those considered oppressors, both positioning their accusers as powerful while

simultaneously accusing them of abusing that power. Yet Trump—and countless others—also still use ‘witch’ as a term of vilification against women. During the presidential election campaign, Hillary Clinton was repeatedly defined as a witch by Trump supporters, but lacking the innocence of Trump’s claims for himself: Clinton was ‘the wicked witch of the Left’, pictured with green skin, pointy hat, and riding a broomstick; her opponents claimed she smelt of sulphur. Aligning her with such stereotypical representations of witchcraft evidenced the power plays at the root of such blatant and public misogyny.

This focus on the binary nature of witch accusations—on the guilt or innocence of both accusers and accused—shows how the reclamation of the witch in the twenty-first century is, as it has always been, concerned with power and, frequently, the relative positioning of gender. Yet, as in histories of Salem, the child’s position in relation to witchcraft is often overlooked, except in its relation with the witch mother. As Purkiss comments:

Because most people know little of Paganism, and because the word ‘witch’ retains diachronically its connections of menace to children, witches have often had problems with the police and social services. Many witches will no longer talk about their beliefs to strangers, in case the social take away their kids.<sup>29</sup>

Purkiss’ claims are centred around language and interpretation, but also position the child as not-witch in popular conceptions of language, as that which cannot be witch, and as the innocent who is both threatened by the witch—in that its known innocence can be troubled or removed and that the child can therefore become a witch—and who must be removed from the witch: society requires that witches should and must be (made) sterile. As with the reviews of the RSC’s 2018 production of *Macbeth*, children are therefore positioned by society as unsuitable to be in any relation to witchcraft, as innocent and in danger of that innocence being damaged.

And this, perhaps, is among the ongoing problems that we face when attempting to consider the role of children in the Salem witch trials: that an assumption of their innate innocence, and our investment as adults in keeping it as such, keeps getting in the way. As Zelizer has discussed in her work on the changing role of children in American society, our sentimental investment in the child and our valuing it as such has resulted in any other views or interpretations being neatly swept under the carpet as if

they never existed. And when a reviewer of Henry James' 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, in which a governess attempts to keep two children from the evil machinations of the ghosts of two former employees, wrote: 'The feeling after perusal of the horrible story is that one has been assisting in an outrage upon the holiest and sweetest fountain of human innocence, and helping to debauch—at least by helplessly standing by—the pure and trusting nature of children', we know that any attempt to read the child's relation to the supernatural is in trouble.<sup>30</sup>

Yet accusations of witchcraft against children are not just part of a history we can dismiss or consider only at a safe divide: they have become part of a growing tide of child abuse in Europe, the US, and across Africa.<sup>31</sup> Charity Safe Child Africa reports that children accused of witchcraft 'risk being abused, tortured, or even killed [...] 80% of those children will run away or be abandoned by their parents'.<sup>32</sup> And Unicef's 2010 report, 'Children Accused of Witchcraft', notes both that 'belief in witchcraft is widespread across sub-Saharan African countries' and that 'the number of children who suffer from abuse, exclusion, stigmatization and physical violence (sometimes fatal) as a result of beliefs in witchcraft, the magical power of twins or people with albinism, is increasing each year'.<sup>33</sup> As the report's title attests, the *fear* of witchcraft remains the primary response to belief where it exists, with children accused of 'the ability to harm someone through the use of mystical power'; or, as it was termed in Salem and before, *maleficium*.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, in the US and other western societies, we dress our children up as storybook witches, complete with stick-on warts and pointy hat each Halloween (confirming the aged crone stereotype rather than the child as a witch, thus disturbing our own social order as much as that of the early modern period) and send them out in quest of candy in a neat reversal of the *Hansel and Gretel* story; we write books for preschool children about witches; and we cast teenagers as witches themselves in YA stories. The twenty-first century witch that we offer our children is a myth: sanitised, fictionalised, and safe.

### THE ARCHIVE AND THE UNCANNY

As I have discussed throughout this work, language is at the centre of our understanding (and our confusion) over the events of 1692 and must be considered in any claim that the trials might be over. On the one hand, once the commentators pile in, we might surmise that—in one sense, at least—the event itself is over. While Brattle and Willard both wrote

condemnations of the trials while they were still going on, Phips' decision to ban publications on the event on October 12, 1692—possibly as a result of these publications—led to an eerie silence until mid-1693.<sup>35</sup> Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*, the work least critical of the trials, emerged first; as Marc Callis comments: 'Mather [...] goes out of his way to defend the character and mental state of both the accusers and the judges'; while Calef claimed that 'he wrote more like an Advocate than an Historian'.<sup>36</sup> This was followed by his father Increase Mather's work, *Cases of Conscience Concerning Witchcraft*, which was written during the trials, in October 1692, but was not published until June 1693. Lawson's *A Brief and True Narrative of Witchcraft at Salem Village* was also written in 1692, probably as early as April 5, according to Burr, but was finally printed in London anonymously in 1693, suggesting that it might still have been considered unsafe to speak against the trials; indeed, Hale's *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* was written in 1697 but not published until 1702, after Hale's death. And into the breach also stepped Calef, whose London-printed 1700 work, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, led the way for historians to follow, in that while he was in Massachusetts at the time of the trials, he wrote his book both at a geographical and temporal remove and primarily as a response to Cotton Mather's similarly titled work rather than as a commentary on the trials themselves.<sup>37</sup> Since that point, every paper, book, and other work on the trials have been subject to a similar paper-trail from the historians, each trying to make sense of events that can only be known at all through the language of others; then novelists, poets, playwrights; then newspaper articles and blogs, Facebook posts and tweets; and next: who knows? As Robert Detweiler noted as far back as 1975: 'It may well be that we have expended more ink on the witchcraft episode in tiny Salem village than on any other single event in early American history'.<sup>38</sup>

As this proliferation of works might suggest, there is something uncanny about the language of Salem, and one contributory factor is the question of *how* we know what we know about Salem, in other words: the archive. While this is not the place to expend too many words on theories of the archive, it is worth considering why Salem's archive matters in the afterlife of the trials and the ongoing cultural and linguistic constructions of Salem's children. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons that Salem has attracted so much scholarship compared to other witch trials in both the US and Europe is the extent of its archives: while many of the trial records are lost, along with all manner of documents that we cannot possibly know about

from our vantage point of the twenty-first century, extensive records of arrests, examinations, officers' returns, and so on, remain a treasure trove for scholars. Yet the very extent of Salem's records has created something of an uncanny effect. In her ground-breaking work on literature and psychoanalysis in which she considers the afterlife of the publication of James' novella, Shoshana Felman claims:

If the strength of literature could be defined by the intensity of its impact on the reader, by the vital energy and power of its *effect*, *The Turn of the Screw* would doubtless qualify as one of the strongest—i.e., most *effective*—texts of all time, judging by the quantity and intensity of the echoes it has produced, of the critical literature to which it has given rise [*Felman's*].<sup>39</sup>

While Felman is discussing literature rather than historical records here, her claims are still applicable to the Salem archives: after all, much of the 'effect' of Salem is predicted on the extent of its archives, but this is an archive that is not stable in that it has drawn so many works in its wake, with contemporary documents such as Brattle's letter, Cotton Mather's journals, and Lawson's testimony, and even later works such as Upham's history of Salem, each eventually finding its way into the archives.<sup>40</sup> As such, Salem has been subject to the uncanny effect of abundance not proving enough but rather creating a superabundance, of which this narrative is now a part. As with *The Turn of the Screw*, the echoes from Salem continue to grow rather than fading away over time, and this is so much more the case now, in the twenty-first century, with the digitisation of the Salem archives and the exceptional work undertaken since then by Bernard Rosenthal and his team which allow access to scholars and idle enquirers across the world.

Yet these echoes are taking place in what we might call a haunted house; in fact, it might even be argued that they are creating a haunting that is apart from and in excess of the archives. After all, much of what Salem represents in popular culture has little to do with the events of 1692. The modern-day town of Salem is full of exhibits about witches; shops selling magical spell books and apparatus; and a statue of 1970s housewife-cum-witch Samantha from the TV series, *Bewitched* (ironically, the complaints that she is a fictional character do not always seem to apply to the total fictionalisation of the events of 1692 in which, once again, the accused are now witches). In tourist season, the town even re-enacts the trial of the first hanged witch, Bridget Bishop, allowing the spectators to decide her

guilt or innocence; she is frequently found guilty, despite the fact that her first accuser recanted his confession on his death-bed. The echoes therefore expand far beyond the printed language of academic study, becoming part of American and wider western culture.<sup>41</sup>

In considering Salem as an archive, and Salem's children as created both in and by that archive, I wish to read Derrida's interpretations of the archive in which he claims: 'the meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address'.<sup>42</sup> As such, what Derrida constructs as '*the meaning*' [my italics] of the archive is always subject to displacement, a reference to something that both precedes and is other to itself; and is therefore uncanny, haunted, that which was 'initially a house' but one which is only ever located in the past and was immediately displaced by something other, which was in turn displaced itself. Further, Derrida claims:

[D]ocuments [...] are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged topology. They inhabit this uncommon place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in privilege. At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a sense of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible.<sup>43</sup>

Under this formulation, Derrida explains how the archive is always subject to a prior selection, a decision as to what is included and what is not. As is the case in Salem, this selection may be subject to all sorts of outside forces, including (but not limited to) what has survived the passage of time and what has already been archived elsewhere or kept privately. Yet what is placed within the archive is also subject to a topology that, by its very nature, is elastic, but one that is also subject to certain laws. Those documents in the archive therefore 'inhabit this uncommon place' at which 'a sense of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible'. As such, while the archive might be a 'house, a domicile' and therefore subject to a continual deferral, it is also always both place but not a place, both seen and unseen: the archive as haunted house.

Perhaps most pertinently for our readings of Salem, Derrida also claims: 'The archivization produces as much as it records the event'.<sup>44</sup> This has certainly proved the case for readings of children in the 'echoes' produced by the Salem archives as they already set our expectations. For example, many of the names of accused children in the tables in Chap. 1 of this



work may be unfamiliar to any but the most dedicated scholar. Why? Because of their relative unimportance in archival documents. They were not hanged; there were statistically less of them than adults; we cannot always tell or decide if they are children or not, even when we are specifically looking for them (which is frequently not the case); and because the afflicted girls gained so much more attention, even then, in terms of discussion.

Yet the archive is not the only source for this uncanny effect created by narratives of Salem: the other source is us. After all, in our roles as historians and writers, our main concern is to find out what happened, no matter our tentative acceptance of the restrictions on our ability to do so. As Detweiler claims: 'scholars ever since have been attempting to establish who to blame for it'; in other words, he is commenting on the implication of the reader and the critic in this continual replaying of the trials in which we decide who is innocent and who, therefore, is guilty.<sup>45</sup> And this recalls, once more, Felman's commentary on the aftermath of the publication of James' *The Turn of the Screw*. She comments further that 'what is perceived as the most scandalous thing about this scandalous story is that *we are forced to participate in the scandal*' [Felman's italics].<sup>46</sup> In our writings about the events of Salem, we too find ourselves drawn into this uncanny 'ghost effect', finding ourselves not just objective commentators but participants in the very trials themselves.<sup>47</sup> We review the available evidence; we consider both sides of the argument; and, with very few exceptions, we point the finger at some person or some group, or even some outside cause, needing to assign blame in order to bring order: to solve the trials and attain some kind of resolution, even as we acknowledge the futility of our efforts.

### THE GHOST IN THE HOUSE

Yet, as this book has aimed to prove, the lessons of Salem and the role of its children are still vitally important for and in all societies, and the name of Salem still remains a haunted house. Discussing her attempt to murder the idealised domestic 'angel in the house' that was disturbing her work as a writer, Virginia Woolf wrote: 'It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe [...] The Angel was dead; what then remained?'<sup>48</sup> And the same might be said for the 'phantoms' of Salem: the name of Salem is that

which continues to haunt American society and whose dead cannot stay dead, constantly hauled back out of their graves in the names of justice, of example, and even of commercialism. Paradoxically, however, Salem's children can be figured as ghosts as they are there but we either cannot see or refuse to see them, and they are both past, fixed by the materials we have, but always subject to interpretation in an uncanny haunting not just of Salem but of the writer's and reader's imagination; yet they are also not past at all in that they continue to inform our understanding of what happened in Salem: of the relationship between child and witch, child and witch hunt, child and legal status both inside and outside of court, of what childhood is, and—crucially—of our own investment in reading childhood at all. And at a time when children and childhood are still under attack, no matter what, exactly, each of us conceives childhood to be—when Trump keeps migrant children in cages and American children are cuffed and led out of classrooms for alleged disobedience; when the UK government blocks a law guaranteeing asylum-seeking children to be reunited with their parents, and our gutter press demonises children who are so often victims of their social circumstances; when children are still being accused of witchcraft in Africa and sacrificed for the same reason; even when we dress our children up as witches and send them out on Halloween: considering our investment in childhood and its adult-predicated relations to witchcraft has never been more vital.

## NOTES

1. Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997) p. 133.
2. 'Governor Phips' letters', Burr, p. 200.
3. All Sewall quotes from Richard Francis, (2005) *Judge Sewall's Apology* (London: Harper Perennial), pp. 181–182.
4. All jurors' letter quotes from Calef in Burr, pp. 387–388.
5. All Hale quotes in Burr, pp. 404, 405.
6. Hoffer, p. 136.
7. <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/pardon> [accessed 3 July 2018].
8. Upham, p. 509.
9. Upham, p. 510.
10. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, pp. 37, 38, 39.
11. Hill, p. 216.
12. Upham, p. 512.

13. With thanks to Marilynne K. Roach for this information on the fate of Betty Parris; to Jaimee Joroff of Concord's Barrow Bookstore for alerting me to her afterlife in Concord; and to Leslie Wilson of Concord's Free Public Library for informing me of and sending me this article.
14. Schiff, p. 407.
15. Rosenthal et al., p. 889.
16. Hite, p. 188.
17. Hite, pp. 199–213, 202.
18. Hite, 'Appendix A: Accused Witches', p. 211.
19. Hite, 'Appendix B: Accusers and Afflicted', p. 217.
20. Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, p. 385.
21. Richard Beck (2015) *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), p. xx.
22. According to Levack, 'The Horrors of Witchcraft': '[In] the Virginia McMartin Preschool trial in Manhattan Beach, California, in the 1980s [...] charges were brought against the owner and six staff members of the school for the sexual abuse of 360 children over a ten-year period. The charges included not only sexual molestation but also participation in satanic rites'. Levack, p. 930.
23. Wolfgang Behringer (2004) *Witches and Witch-Hunts* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 143.
24. Owen Davies (2013) *America Bewitched: The story of witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 12.
25. Alex Mar (2015) *Witches of America* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books), p. 11.
26. Kristen J Sollée (2017) *Witches, Sluts, Feminists* (Berkeley, CA: ThreeL Media).
27. Kristina West (2018) 'War of the Witches', *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/war-of-the-witches-woman-are-accused-while-men-claim-victim-status-105870>.
28. Gwilyn Mumford, 'Woody Allen forced to clarify comments about 'sad' Harvey Weinstein', *The Guardian* 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/oct/16/harvey-weinstein-woody-allen-sad-comment-sexual-abuse-allegations> [accessed 27 March 2020].
29. Purkiss, p. 50.
30. Shoshana Felman (1977) 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation' in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 97.
31. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/01/accusations-witchcraft-pattern-child-abuse> [accessed 20 March 2018].
32. <http://www.safechildafrica.org/childwitches> [accessed 4 September 2019].

33. Unicef (2010) 'Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa', pp. 1, 5.
34. Unicef, p. 1.
35. Samuel Willard's work, *Some Miscellany Observations on our Present Debates respecting Witchcrafts, in a Dialog between S&B*, was published during the trials in 1692.
36. Marc Callis (2005) 'The Aftermath of the Salem Witch Trials in Colonial America', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 198; Calef, p. 379.
37. See Callis' excellent essay on the aftermath of the trials for more on the papers written during and in the immediate aftermath of the trials.
38. Robert Detweiler (1975) 'Shifting Perspectives on the Salem Witch Trials', *The History Teacher*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 596–610, 596.
39. Felman, p. 96.
40. For example, my first encounter with Robert Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World* was through an archived nineteenth-century publication in the Boston Athenaeum reading room when I was researching something else entirely.
41. I am English, living in England; and even here, Salem is the watchword for witch trials and unfair persecution; Salem is far better known than the English Pendle trials, for example, despite similarities between the two cases.
42. Derrida, p. 2.
43. Derrida, p. 3.
44. Derrida, p. 17.
45. Detweiler, p. 597.
46. Felman, p. 97.
47. Felman, p. 98.
48. Virginia Woolf (1931) *Professions for Women*, <http://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Woolf.pdf> [accessed 27 March 2020].

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